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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of the three 2002 issues of a newsletter devoted to identifying and promoting strategies to reduce the poverty rate of young children and to improve the life chances of children still living in poverty. The Winter issue includes the following articles: (1) "NCCP [National Center for Children in Poverty] Responds to New Environment for Children and Low-Income Families"; (2) "Welfare Reform and the Current Recession"; and (3) "Issues Facing New York City's Low-Income Families More Acute after World Trade Center Attack." Articles in the Spring/Summer issue include the following: (1) "Framing the PRWORA/TANF [Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families] Reauthorization Debate"; (2) "Making TANF Work Better for Children"; and (3) "Anti-Poverty Program Makes Progress in United Kingdom." The Fall issue includes the following articles: (1) "Children's Readiness for School: Toward a Strategic Policy Framework"; (2) "Infancy Not Too Early To Plan for School Success"; and (3) "Child Care Inadequate for Vulnerable Young Children." Regular sections in each issue of the newsletter include current activities of the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) and information on publications available from NCCP. (HTH)



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# News & Issues, 2002.

# Vol. 12, No. 1-3, Winter-Fall, 2002.

Carole J. Oshinsky, Editor

National Center for Children in Poverty
Columbia University

2002

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WINTER 2002 Vol. 12, No. 1

# News & Issues

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*Identifying and promoting strategies to reduce child poverty and to improve the life chances of low-income families*

## NCCP Responds to New Environment for Children and Low-Income Families

by J. Lawrence Aber

Two powerful events—the onset of a recession and the September 11 terrorist attack—have recently transformed the lives of millions of American families. Many families now feel increased vulnerability, but none more so than low-income families with children.

Parents in these already vulnerable families are often the first to lose their jobs in a recession or to suffer from budget cutbacks as state and local governments retrench. But it does not have to be that way.

As America copes with war, recession, and reauthorizing the historic 1996 welfare law, the next several months present important opportunities to reframe old debates and forge new strategies to give more families the tools they need to weather difficult times. Have the tragic and troubling events of the past several months created a greater sense of shared vulnerability and economic insecurity in America? If so, how should people concerned about low-income families and their children respond?

This edition of *News & Issues* examines a number of issues and NCCP activities that are particularly relevant to the new circumstances facing low-income families. It:

- Provides two expert perspectives on reauthorizing the 1996 welfare law;
- Reviews welfare policies affecting low-income families in New York City;
- Looks at whether the September 11 tragedy has increased compassion for the poor in America;
- Introduces new publications about vulnerable families under stress, including the first two policy papers in a new series, **Promoting the Emotional Well-being of Children and Families**, as well as a new book, *Work, Welfare, and Well-Being;* and
- Summarizes a roundtable on effective communications, "Getting the Message Right, Motivating Progress on Poverty and Economic Security," co-hosted by NCCP and Demos.

One of the key challenges during this turbulant period will be the reauthorization of the 1996 welfare law.

***It will take great ingenuity and determination on the part of policymakers, advocates, researchers, and other concerned citizens to prevent another period of rising child poverty rates and related social costs.***

As regular readers of *News & Issues* already know, NCCP has been actively involved for quite some time in anticipating and understanding the effects of welfare reform on children and in identifying ways that welfare reform can be used to enhance children's health and development.

For instance, in 1995–1996, as national welfare reform legislation was being debated and then passed in the form of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), NCCP shunned easy predictions. Instead, in 1997, we developed a research-based framework to forecast and analyze the impact of welfare reform on children (see How Welfare Reform Can Help or Hurt Children—Children and Welfare

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POLICY POINT OF VIEW

# Welfare Reform and the Current Recession

*by Andrew J. Cherlin and William Julius Wilson*

*Andrew J. Cherlin is Benjamin H. Griswold III Professor of Public Policy in the Department of Sociology at The Johns Hopkins University. He received a Merit Award from the National Institutes of Health for his research on the influence of family structure on children, and is a past president of the Population Association of America. Professor Cherlin and Professor William Julius Wilson are co-investigators of "Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three-City Study," with Ronald Angel, Linda Burton, P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, and Robert Moffitt.*

*William Julius Wilson is Lewis P. and Linda L. Geyser University Professor at Harvard University and director of the Joblessness and Urban Poverty Research Program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government. He is a MacArthur Prize Fellow and past president of the American Sociological Association. In 1998, he was awarded the National Medal of Science. His books include* Power, Racism and Privilege *(1973),* The Declining Significance of Race *(1978),* The Truly Disadvantaged *(1987),* When Work Disappears *(1996) and* The Bridge Over the Racial Divide *(1999).*

***A reauthorization bill that recognizes the need to increase support to the recently employed, including measures to offset the effects of an economic downturn, is more important now than ever.***

The overhaul of the nation's welfare system that took place following the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996 could not have been better timed. It occurred during a period of strong economic growth, extremely low unemployment rates, increases in the minimum wage, expansions of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and unexpectedly low inflation, all of which enlarged the employment and earnings of poor families. But in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, this prosperous era seems like ancient history.

Even before September 11, unemployment had been rising and economic growth appeared to be slowing. Now, the economy is officially in a recession; and unemployment, which had fallen to a three-decade low of 3.9 percent last summer, has risen sharply. How welfare reform will fare in this altered economic climate is an open question.

## Welfare Rolls Declining

When unemployment rates fell in the late 1990s, employers were forced to reach far down the job queue. For perhaps the first time in a generation, low-skilled single mothers with little work experience found widespread job opportunities. These gains could be jeopardized by the recession, especially in areas of concentrated poverty where rates of joblessness can surge to extraordinary levels.

To be sure, the drop in the welfare rolls is not attributable solely to the strong economy. As most readers of this publication know, caseloads have declined dramatically, from over 12 million individuals in 1996 to fewer than 6 million today. Few social scientists would have predicted a 50 percent drop in the welfare rolls in five years, even if they had foreseen the unprecedented economic prosperity. In addition, many former recipients have found at least part-time employment. National statistics show a marked rise in the percentage of low-income single mothers who are working for pay and even a slight gain in their wages. The employment-inducing strategies of welfare reform almost certainly played a roll in these changes, along with wage supports such as the EITC and increases in the minimum wage.

## Self-Worth Rising

To informed observers, these changes in the rates of welfare and employment among poor single mothers are understandable, given favorable economic conditions. Studies have long shown that poor people, including recipients of public assistance, dislike welfare and would much rather be self-sufficient. There is a basic dignity that Americans derive from paid work, even if the wages are low and opportunities for advancement are limited.

That much is clear from a study of families in low-income neighborhoods in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio that we are conducting with several collaborators. Some mothers who have left welfare and worked as security guards, grill cooks, shelf stockers, or waitresses have reported an improved sense of self. "I started working again," a woman holding down two jobs said. "I started feeling good, I'm making my own money again." At least in good times, the American economy can produce large numbers of low-wage jobs and people can take pride in being employed.

But even in this prosperous period, some families were struggling. In our 1999 survey, three-fourths of the women who had left welfare in the previous two years had incomes below the federal poverty line. The longer they had been off welfare, the less likely they were to have any kind of health insurance because the decrease in their Medicaid coverage was not offset by an increase in private insurance. Also, a national survey conducted by the Urban Institute in 1999 showed that nearly half of the adults who had recently left welfare said that at some

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POLICY POINT OF VIEW

# What Would Tocqueville Say?

*by David Cohen*

*David Cohen is the author of* Chasing the Red, White, and Blue—A Journey in Tocqueville's Footsteps Through Contemporary America, *published in November by Picador USA. A London-based journalist, Mr. Cohen came to the United States in 1997 on a Harkness Fellowship and was hosted by NCCP for three years. The idea for the book and the conception of the journey came in collaboration with Dr. Lawrence Aber, director of NCCP. Mr Cohen has been published in the* New York Times *as well as prominent British newspapers and magazines and has won awards for his reporting in South Africa. Chapters from the book will be on the NCCP Web site at http://www.nccp.org.*

One hundred and seventy years ago, just a few yards from what we now call Ground Zero, Alexis de Tocqueville started his journey in quest of the American character. What would the young Frenchman say were he to return to these shores after the September 11 terrorist attacks? I have an inkling because two years ago I retraced his journey, traveling from New York City to the Rust Belt, through the Ohio River Valley, down the Mississippi Delta, on through the Deep South, and concluding in Washington, D.C.

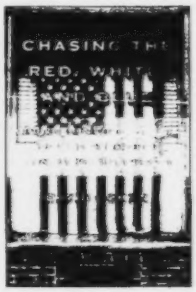
Tocqueville was struck then by the great compassion of the American people. Walking out from lower Broadway today, from the same spot where he lodged in 1831, he could not fail to be impressed by the character displayed by Americans in the wake of the September 11 tragedy. He might be moved to report back to his fellow Europeans now as he did then: "This is an extraordinarily gentle, empathetic, and compassionate people."

But Tocqueville's description of the compassion that coursed through American society was premised on a deeper observation. It was, he said, the unprecedented equality of conditions in American society—of wealth and of opportunity—that was the reason for the reciprocal care with which Americans regarded each other.

## Equality Has Disappeared

"There are several causes which can concur in making a nation's mores less rough, but I think that the most potent of them all is equality of conditions," he wrote. "Equality which makes men feel their freedom, also shows them their weakness. They are free, but liable to a thousand accidents, and experience is not slow to teach them that although they may not usually need the help of others, a moment will almost always arrive when they cannot do without it." In short, he argued, it was equality of conditions that made Americans feel they were all in the same boat, and this created "an empathy between them" which made them "extremely open to compassion."

But this equality that Tocqueville witnessed has in fact




disappeared. Today, inequality is dramatically on the rise in America: since the 1970s, the average real income of the richest fifth of families has risen by 30 percent while the incomes of the poorest fifth has fallen by more than 20 percent. And with this pulling apart, equality of opportunity has become severely compromised. Tocqueville would have been disturbed by this trend. "Thus the same man who is full of humanity towards his fellows when they are also his equals becomes insensible to their sorrows when there is no more equality," he warned.

Delving deeper into the psyche of modern Americans, the Frenchman might have wondered about the effect of the rising inequality on their humanity. Does this unity, this incredible spirit, this empathy for each other, this outpouring of compassion for the most vulnerable members of society—does it flow in normal times as well as in crisis?

I wish I could report otherwise, but on my journey, talking with people at every level of society—from Manhattan real estate brokers and Washington lobbyists to supermarket clerks and casino shuttle-bus drivers—I discovered that the haves had purposefully distanced themselves from the have-nots: geographically, socially, psychologically, and emotionally. In parts of the country, the rapidly widening gap between rich and poor had not so much frayed the social fabric as ripped it apart. "I never give poor people a second thought," was the disturbing sentiment of many young upwardly mobile professionals I spoke to. The more the haves separate themselves physically, the more deaf many become to the voices of the socially and economically vulnerable.

Such an outcome was Tocqueville's gravest fear for America. "If the citizens continue to shut themselves up more and more narrowly in the little circle of petty domestic interests... there is a danger that they may in the end become practically out of reach of those great and powerful public emotions which do indeed perturb peoples but which also make them grow and refresh them," he wrote.

So why did Americans behave differently in the wake of September 11?

## Is New Compassion Appearing?

If the terrible events of that day showed us anything, it is that we are all vulnerable. Our money is no defense against acts of terrorism. On September 11, Americans displayed the character that Tocqueville marveled at because they rediscovered that we are all in this together:



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**NCCP Responds to New Environment** *(continued from page 1)*

***Based on past economic trends, it will be very difficult to avoid an increase in child poverty during the current recession.***

Reform Issue Brief 1) and then used that framework to help promote and synthesize new research (see our Web site at **www.researchforum.org** summarizing existing studies) and to examine specific policy and practice issues concerning children and welfare reform. (See our **Children and Welfare Reform** issue brief series, Numbers 2–8.)

Our framework was simple but useful. On the basis of the knowledge that existed at the time, we identified three major factors that could possibly be affected by changes in welfare policy and practice, and if affected, would influence children's well-being. These factors were: (1) family income, (2) quality of and stresses on parenting, and (3) quality of and access to services. We argued that if welfare reform increased family income, quality of parenting, and quality of and access to key services (like child care), then children would benefit. If welfare reform reduced family income and the quality of parenting and services, children's health and development would suffer.

By October 2002, Congress must reauthorize PRWORA. As we approach the upcoming debates, NCCP has stepped back to ask the question, "how well did our framework hold up? What have we learned about the impact of this major national experiment in low-income children and their families?" Over the next several months, NCCP will release several issues briefs and research briefs that present new information or synthesize existing knowledge in new ways that will inform the reauthorization of PRWORA and promote child well-being.

We also know that, based on past economic trends, it will be very difficult to avoid an increase in child poverty during the current recession. The child poverty rate was reduced by one-quarter from 1993–2000, during a period of sustained economic growth and policy changes that provided incentives to work and increased earnings (e.g., a major expansion of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, increases in the minimum wage and child care subsidies). The child poverty rate increased significantly during the periods 1979–1983 and 1991–1993 that were marked by recession.

It will take great ingenuity and determination on the part of policymakers, advocates, researchers, and other concerned citizens to prevent another period of rising child poverty rates and related social costs. We at NCCP hope this *News & Issues* offers information that can be used to help protect vulnerable children and families now, when they need such support more than at any time in recent memory. ■

**Welfare Reform and the Current Recession** *(continued from page 2)*

point in the previous year they had not been able to pay mortgage, rent, or utility bills.

Both our survey and the Urban Institute survey are what we may now call best-case research. They show how low-income families were doing during the best of times. It is clear that even then, many low-income families would have needed continued help—such as expanded wage supplements, increased access to health insurance, generous child-care vouchers, and transportation assistance—in order to become self sufficient. It is likely that more families will need such help in the months to come. They may also benefit from the economic stimulus package that Congress is considering as we write this article.

The welfare reform law must be reauthorized by Congress in 2002, and debates about modifying it have already begun. In some circles, it has already been declared a success. That judgment, we suggest, is premature. Because of recent events, a reauthorization bill that recognizes the need to increase support to the recently employed, including measures designed to offset the effects of an economic downturn, is more important now than ever. ■

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**What Would Tocqueville Say?** *(continued from page 3)*

Republican and Democrat, politician and philanthropist, fireman and stockbroker, janitor and bond dealer.

Will it last? Will this compassion be extended to the millions of Americans who are vulnerable day-to-day beyond the events of September 11th? An astounding 40 percent of American children live in poverty or near poverty (i.e., in families with incomes below 200 percent of the poverty line), and many more families are joining their ranks as thousands of people lose their jobs and the country faces an economic recession. Will President Bush advocate economic or social policies to ease the pain for the least well-off Americans? Will the suffering of the poor and the vulnerable be taken more seriously by private citizens as well as public officials?

Today the Red, White, and Blue flies everywhere, a symbol of the collective pain and resolve that Americans feel. But peering just over the horizon, Tocqueville would have wanted to know: can this collective compassion be sustained? That, he might conclude, will be the litmus test of the nation's character, the real measure of American compassion. ■

NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY
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# Issues Facing New York City's Low-Income Families More Acute After World Trade Center Attack

A slowdown in New York City's economy—already evident before the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center—is imperilling the progress that New York has made in moving people from welfare to work, says Barbara B. Blum, co-author of a new report released by NCCP's Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism titled, *Policies Affecting New York City's Low-Income Families*.

The report reviews New York City's progress in implementing welfare reform since 1996 and highlights several practical areas where the city can do more to help its most vulnerable low-income families. "Including all New Yorkers as we recover and rebuild New York City will be an issue of tremendous importance for the new mayor," said Ms. Blum, director of the Research Forum. The report offers several concrete recommendations to city, state and federal policymakers to help make the next phase of welfare reform in New York City a success.

## Emphasis on Work Is Not Enough

"New York City has in just a few years made commendable progress in transforming its welfare system from one that emphasized provision of cash assistance to one that seeks to help people support their families by working," explains Hugh O'Neill, a co-author of the report and president and founder of Appleseed, Inc. "The transformation is not yet completed, and we are entering a period where the challenges we face may be greater."

According to a report released by New York City Comptroller Alan G. Hevesi on October 4, 2001, the city could lose an estimated 115,300 jobs this fiscal year as a result of the attack, and the Fiscal Policy Institute warns that the recession could bring the job loss total to 350,000. Further, the repercussions of the attack could cost the city's economy between $90 billion and $105 billion over the next two years. The immense impact of the September 11 tragedy on the city's economy makes the challenges described in the NCCP report even greater and more urgent.

**New York City public assistance caseload (recipients)**

Source: New York City Human Resources Administration

***Some 41,000 city residents faced losing their cash assistance benefits at the end of 2001, as federal time limits on cash assistance took effect.***

Ms. Blum notes that despite dramatic declines in the overall New York City welfare caseload and the establishment of many support services to assist low-income people, some 41,000 welfare recipients faced losing cash assistance at the end of 2001, as federal time limits on individual cash assistance took effect. At the same time, more children not living with a parent (so-called child-only cases) are entering the city's welfare rolls. There are now more than 34,000 such cases in the city. These cases include the U.S.-born children of adult immigrants who, under the terms of the federal welfare reform law of 1996, are no longer eligible for assistance. They also include poor children who live with grandparents or other elderly relatives who rely on Social Security and the children of women in prison.

Among the report's other key findings are:

- Between March 1995 and April 2001, the number of people receiving public assistance in New York City declined by 55 percent.
- More than 121,000 public assistance recipients obtained jobs in 2000.
- New York's success in moving people off welfare during the past few years has been made possible in part by significant improvements in the management of its Human Resources Administration.
- The number of people who are working but still receiving welfare has increased sharply since 1994, from just 2 percent to 14 percent of the city's welfare caseload. These are mainly people who have gotten jobs, but are not earning enough to completely leave welfare.
- As the number of people on welfare has declined, many of those who remain face problems that make it more difficult for them to find jobs, such as lack of the most basic skills, very limited proficiency in English, or histories of drug abuse or mental illness.
- The city has experienced chronic problems in delivering "transitional benefits"— such as subsidized child care and health insurance—to people who leave welfare for work.

## New Strategies Can Help

The report also offers policy recommendations for city, state, and federal governments. For example:

- For recipients who face more serious barriers to em-

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# Center News Briefs

- A new report from NCCP shows how community development corporations (CDCs) in low-income communities and neighborhoods have the potential to promote the healthy development of low-income young children and families through child development and family support strategies. These include implementing child development and family support programs, rehabilitating housing for child care providers and offering them training in business and child care skills, and developing support strategies for families, including grandparents and others raising young children. CDCs need better resources and technical assistance to do this, but they bring an important voice to the table for the broader children's policy and advocacy community and should be participants and leaders in strategic community planning for young children and families.

- The February 2002 issue of ***the forum*** describes what is known about immigrant families and their children, a topic that requires far more attention and analysis than it currently receives. Drawing on the work of **Dr. Donald Hernandez** who headed the Committee on the Health and Adjustment of Immigrant Children and Families for the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, the issue underscores the growing importance of children in immigrant families to U.S. society, their diverse origins and concentrated residence in a handful of states, and the the high occurence of poverty among them compared to U.S.-born families, despite the strong work ethic of their parents.

- The November 2001 issue of ***the forum*** describes the Research Forum's Advocacy Initiative sponsored by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation that has served to highlight some of the key research needs of advocates that researchers need to be aware of and the importance of state- and county-level data for advocacy efforts. Advocates in four states shared their concerns about welfare reform implementation.

- Recent guest speakers at NCCP include:

  (1) **Ingrid LeRoux** of Princeton University describing how a community nutrition effort in Cape Town, South Africa, serving families in the shantytowns of Crossroads Center and Philani, developed into a model child health and nutrition rehabilitation program that includes child development services, child care, and HIV prevention. Other projects are a women's employment training and weaving program, a mapping project, and a research program that employs community outreach workers. The democratic management process used by the staff has influenced the path of political policy in South Africa.

  (2) **Dr. Lawrence L. Wu** of the University of Wisconsin discussed "Is There an Engine of Nonmarital Fertility?" and concluded that intervals between first and second nonmarital births are longer than between marital births, and that children born to an unmarried mother are not more likely to have a nonmarital birth—debunking the engine hypothesis—but that married women experiencing a marital separation are less likely to have a subsequent nonmarital birth than unmarried women—upholding the break hypothesis.

  (3) Save the Children staff and NCCP Council of Advisors member **Professor Dan Lichter** of Ohio State University shared the findings of their study of rural child poverty that found many forgotten poor children in isolated areas despite the general reduction in child poverty rates across the country. A report with policy recommendations will be released in spring 2002.

  (4) **Dr. Nancy Reichman** of the Office of Population Research, Princeton University, showed that prenatal care had very little or no effect on reducing low birthweight or permature births in New Jersey's Health Start program, but did help identify women at risk for other medical conditions and may affect future birth outcomes positively. On-going primary care and economic support may be more important factors in preventing unwanted pregnancies and ensuring women enter pregnancy in good health than prenatal care.

  (5) **Guy Stevenson** presented a set of indicators of children's well-being and argued that what we do for our children shows what kind of society we are and that race and poverty in America are the biggest impediments to equal opportunity to achieve success.

  (6) Former NCCP staff member **Stephanie Jones** of Yale University and **Dr. Alice Carter** of University of Massachuseetts, Boston, spoke on "Measuring social-emotional problems and competencies in 1- to 3-year-old children: The impact of poverty and other ecological risks," and argued that we need to put more emphasis on measuring competencies as a better predictor of how children will cope with future problems. They have been working to refine the Infant-Toddler Social and Emotional Assessment (ITSEA) tool.

  (7) **Dr. Kathryn McLearn** of the Commonwealth Foundation (now an NCCP researcher) presented a talk entitled: Healthy Steps: Promoting Child Development for Young Children, based on her experience with a national demonstration program to improve early childhood development in the context of health care.

- NCCP Postdoctoral Research Scientist **Dr. Lauren Appelbaum** talked about her dissertation research, "The Influence of Perceived Deservingness on Policy Decisions Regarding Aid to the Poor." She concluded

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# Sept. 11th Tragedies Heighten Need to Address Mental Health Issues Facing Low-Income Families

The tragedy of 9.11 has inspired unparalleled empathy and generosity among the American people. It has also helped focus new attention on the impact of trauma on families and children. This has resulted in widespread efforts to increase access to crisis intervention services and, if needed, long-term support services for those still struggling with the impact of September 11th. But these tragic events also can help focus attention on a population whose mental health needs are typically ignored—low-income children and adults who are facing widespread emotional challenges across the United States.

NCCP recently released the first two policy papers in a groundbreaking new series that examines effective strategies and public policy opportunities to promote the emotional health of young children and families, including depressed mothers and their children. The series—**Promoting the Emotional Well-Being of Children and Families**—builds on NCCP's earlier work to educate and assist policymakers, community leaders, and advocates as they take appropriate and informed action to ensure the healthy development of children and their families.

## Emphasize Prevention and Early Intervention

"This series is intended to be a wake-up call—to challenge communities all over the country to attend to the mental health needs of young children and their families," explains Jane Knitzer, Ed.D., deputy director of NCCP and co-author of the series. "The innovations and collaborations highlighted in the series can be used strategically in ways that fit community needs and strengths. Young children and their caregivers need developmentally appropriate interventions that will prevent more serious emotional and behavioral problems, repair problematic relationships, and help young children develop the emotional skills they need to succeed in school."

*Building Services and Systems to Support the Healthy Emotional Development of Young Children: An Action Guide for Policymakers* sets forth a framework for community and staff action. "Ensuring that young children have the social, emotional, and behavioral skills to succeed in the early school years, which in turn predicts their ability to succeed throughout school, is increasingly being recognized as central to achieving broad school readiness goals and improving the impact of existing early childhood programs," says Dr. Knitzer.

Using lessons from pioneering community and state-based efforts to help the children, their families, and their other caregivers achieve these competencies, the report highlights steps every community and state can take, building on the network of existing early childhood programs and using federal and other resources creatively.

The second policy paper in the series, *Improving the Odds for the Healthy Development of Young Children in Foster Care,* examines why children in foster care are among the most vulnerable children in the country and identifies action steps to enhance their well-being. Developed in collaboration with Sheryl Dicker, executive director, and Elysa Gordon, senior policy analyst of the New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children, it highlights what governmental agencies, the courts, and other partners can do to improve the physical, developmental, and emotional health of these children who may need enriched experiences to ensure their development is "on track."

As Dr. Knitzer notes, September 11th has made all Americans feel vulnerable. "What better time to strengthen access to appropriate mental health services for all who need them, including low-income children and families."

Complimenting NCCP's recent research, Mary Clare Lennon, Ph.D., M.S., director of social science research at

(continued on page 8)

*September 11th has made all Americans feel vulnerable. What better time to strengthen access to appropriate mental health services for all who need them, including low-income children and families.*

**Risk Factors in Young Children's Emotional Development**

- Low-income women experience rates of clinical depression at rates twice as high as other women. Over 40 percent of low-income women report depressive symptoms.
- Poor outcomes for young children whose mothers are depressed are visible in the cognitive and behavioral performance of children as young as 36 months.
- Children whose mothers experience depression are at high risk themselves for developing depression, anxiety, and conduct disorders.
- 31 percent of all kindergarten children are exposed to three or more demographic risks predictive of poor outcomes (low maternal education, single parent, English not a first language, teen parent, and low-income), 15 percent to two or more.
- Low-income families shows much higher levels of risk.
  - In a national sample of Head Start programs, 17 percent of the children had been exposed to domestic violence, while 3 percent had been victims of violence, a risk factor that often coexists with others (including maternal depression).
  - Low-income families report generally higher levels of stress than their higher-income counterparts. Stress affects parenting negatively, and hence child outcomes.
  - Among 700 women transitioning from welfare to work, 44 percent faced three or more significant barriers to work. This means that their children face three or more significant barriers to school readiness.
  - Overall, it is estimated that anywhere between 25 and 50 percent of low-income children experience risk factors above and beyond poverty.

**Sept. 11th Tragedies Heighten Need** *(continued from page 7)*

***The lives of low-income women are challenging and complex, whether they are employed, on welfare, or both.***

NCCP, has edited a new book titled, *Work, Welfare, and Well-Being*. Food insufficiency, homelessness, material hardship, domestic violence, feelings of hopelessness, depression, and indeed what amounts to chronic trauma are just a few of the psychological and economic challenges facing low-income women raising children in the United States today. The chapters reveal the complex interplay between the psychological well-being of poor women and their families and the economic challenges of work and welfare.

"This book constitutes an extraordinary advancement of our knowledge about the issues and challenges faced by low-income women in an era of dramatic policy transformations," says Thomas Corbett, Ph.D., associate director of the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "It truly does justice to the complexity of these women's lives."

*Welfare, Work, and Well-Being* reflects a growing interest among the research, policy, and media communities in the connections between the psychological and economic well-being of poor women and their families. The sharp decline in welfare caseloads that began even prior to the 1996 welfare legislation has changed the lives of poor women and children in critical ways.

## Acknowledge Challenges for Poor Women

"Taken together, the papers show that the lives of low-income women are challenging and complex, whether they are employed, on welfare, or both," writes Dr. Lennon in her foreword to *Welfare, Work, and Well-Being*. "Some of these challenges are health-related; others have to do with hardship regarding housing, food, social support, and finances."

In this volume, social scientists investigate the associations among welfare, work, social roles, child well-being, material hardship, and women's mental health and the important implications and challenges for future programs and policies. Dr. Lennon and the authors suggest that additional research be conducted into the causal directions of the relationship between welfare and employment status and depression. They also propose further research on the role that income support and treatment programs can play in assisting poor women struggling with depression.

For more information on NCCP's work on vulnerable families under stress, please visit NCCP on the Web at **www.nccp.org**. ■

**Issues Facing New York City's Low-Income Families** *(continued from page 5)*

ployment, the city should adopt a more flexible approach to enforcement of work requirements.

- The city should develop a plan for assessing and addressing the needs of child-only cases.
- The city should create an earned-income tax credit for low-income workers, similar to those already offered by the federal and state governments, which would effectively exempt the working poor from payment of city income taxes.
- New York State should increase the value of its earned income tax credit program.
- Congress should amend the 1996 welfare law so that any month during which a person is working full-time but still receiving some limited cash assistance does not count against the five-year lifetime limit.
- Congress should repeal the provisions of the 1996 law that make recent legal immigrants ineligible for many types of federally funded benefits.
- The federal government should continue to provide to the states the same level of block grant funding under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

NCCP's Research Forum prepared the report in collaboration with Appleseed, a New York City-based consulting firm. In addition to Ms. Blum and Dr. O'Neill, the report was written by Kathryn Garcia, vice president of Appleseed, and Virginie Amerlynck, its senior research associate. Funding for the project was provided by the New York Community Trust.

To receive a copy of the full report, please visit the Research Forum's Web site at **www.researchforum.org**. ■

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**Center News Briefs** *(continued from page 6)*

that people who perceived the poor as undeserving, whether because their own behavior causes their poverty or they behaved in ways that didn't meet societal norms, tended to blame the victim, believe people tend to get what they deserved, and tended to be conservative and support less benefits or no benefits to poor people. Recent U.S. welfare legislation seems to come out of this type of thinking. Those who saw society as responsible viewed welfare recipients as sharing their norms, tended to be liberal, and supported benefits to the poor. Other societies, such as Great Britain, see benefits to the poor as a value and do not measure deservingness. They more often have comprehensive programs with universal eligibility. If low-income workers are viewed as less responsible for their need because they are paying taxes and working hard, the public may be more likely to support giving them benefits, suggests Dr. Appelbaum. These ideas have implications for NCCP attitudinal research.

□ For NCCP staff updates, see the Web site at **www.nccp.org** and click on "About the Center."

# Getting the Message Right Is Critical to Communicating Information on Economic Security and Child Poverty

Organizations using good communications strategies grounded in solid policy and program information can motivate the public to *want* to address the needs of low-income families, particularly welfare recipients.

The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) and Demos: A Network for Ideas and Action, sponsored a workshop entitled, "Getting the Message Right: Motivating Progress on Poverty and Economic Security," in early November 2001 at Demos' New York City offices to explore how concerned groups can work together. The roundtable brought together many organizations representing a wide spectrum of issues and expertise, including the Ad Council, Midwest Partners, America's Second Harvest, New York City Partnership, Century Foundation, Communications Consortium Media Center, Center for Policy Alternatives, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Hauser Group, Inc., Northeast Action, and others.

The purpose of the one-day event was to exchange information about recent efforts to develop better messages and communications strategies to promote more broadly shared prosperity and economic well-being, particularly for low-income families. In addition, participants discussed key challenges to understanding public opinions in this issue area, framing effective messages, and integrating such work into advocacy efforts.

**Comments Shared at Demos Workshop**

- "Viewing the poor, the disadvantaged, as 'the other' is troublesome. It erects a wall. It is important for us to remind people that these people are more like us than not like us."
- "Americans sense that we are a society that is multicultural, that tries to be fair, and that tries to educate everyone. It's time to live that ideal."
- "Communications professionals must learn how to turn a story and educate the media on these issues. The press matters. People want a legitimizer of information."
- "It's important to use contemporary language to motivate change."
- "You must look at what the nation is doing, but remember all politics is local."
- "The challenge is to devise a communications campaign that changes public opinion or that mobilizes public will."
- "People get upset when working people don't have health care and child care."

## Collaborate on Communications

The workshop gave participants the opportunity to begin developing collaborative relationships with one another and a shared agenda to advance messaging work on poverty and economic security in 2002. There was a special focus on connecting state-level and community-based advocates with national communications thinkers and messaging experts.

Demos president Miles Rapoport co-chaired the workshop and facilitated a discussion on recent and current messaging efforts and common principles underlying these efforts related to economic security and poverty.

"There's a sense of outrage that doesn't go away," Rapoport said, "about those who've done fabulously well in the last 10 years and those who have struggled. Somehow we don't have the traction to get results. Let us try to figure out how to get the message right and how to be sharp in presenting our ideas and solutions for change."

Larry Aber, Ph.D., director of NCCP and co-chair of the event, discussed LIFT—Let's Invest in Families Today—a collaborative new initiative created by NCCP to address the widespread problem of child poverty in the United States. (LIFT will be introduced in the next issue of *News and Issues* and on its own Web site this summer.)

"NCCP seeks to combine the best policy and communications research to encourage ally development and mobilization," Dr. Aber said. "LIFT is the public face of what NCCP does. It will provide an electronic toolbox containing evidenced-based policy research and communications research in an understandable way so that state-change advocates can adopt the fundamental strategies with little cost."

Sessions throughout the day examined the obstacles and opportunities for advancing an economic security agenda in the current environment of an ongoing war and economic recession, the challenge of equity messaging in the United States, how to put opinion research and polling data into action, and effective ways of communicating information related to these issues to the media and other powerful messengers.

## Inspire Public to Act

Michelle Olson of Midwest Partners shared a brief video that her organization developed "to raise awareness, generate affection, and inspire action" on issues related to low-income families. The video successfully communicates the message that although welfare caseloads have dropped, poor families still struggle to make ends meet. The video depicting three low-income mothers with children humanizes the issues that poor families face on a daily basis. The video is used as a tool by community organizations affiliated with Midwest Partners, a six-state coalition of human service agencies, advocacy organizations, and concerned citizens who are working together to ensure that the needs of vulnerable families are heard and addressed during the reauthorization of the national welfare reform program.

Sue Hofer of America's Second Harvest, an umbrella organization of food banks and food rescue organizations, discussed details of the organization's three-year outreach effort on child hunger. America's Second



(continued on page 10)

**Getting the Message Right** *(continued from page 9)*

Harvest's campaign proved highly successful, earning media placements in many television news programs and newspapers across the country.

Tammy Draut, associate director of the Common Wealth Project at Demos, relayed recent poll findings on issues related to economic security and poverty. She discussed how two core competing American values—individualism and egalitarianism—strongly influence people's opinions on these issues. Further, she pointed out that while the public supports a range of policies to bolster worker and family income, they remain highly skeptical about the needs of the poor, particularly with regard to welfare recipients.

Workshop participants put together a "work plan" to frame future collaboration. Many believe that Web-based resources, including listservs, electronic newsletters, and a central electronic clearinghouse for polling and research data, would effectively disseminate information among groups wishing to subscribe. People called for greater diversity among members of the work group, more frequent meetings during the year, and increased funding for communications research and message development.

Demos, headquartered in New York City, was founded in 1999 as a national research and advocacy organization to help create a new long-term vision for American society. Demos works creatively and collaboratively to bring new ideas into the public arena and build networks for action on two of the country's most pressing challenges: strengthening democracy and creating greater shared economic prosperity. For more information about Demos, visit the organization's Web site at **www.demos-usa.org**. ■

# More Experts Join NCCP Council of Advisors

Three new Council of Advisors members brought their diverse experience with government policy for low-income families to NCCP this summer. Their backgrounds span the arms of government—from Congressional legislator to federal administrator to government and think tank policy analyst to critic.

Former U.S. senator and presidential candidate **Bill Bradley** is currently a managing director of Allen & Company, Inc. and also chairs the Advisory Board of the Institute for Management of Nonprofits. He brings to NCCP his experience as a senior advisor and vice chairman of the International Council of JP Morgan & Co., Inc. and almost two decades of representing the state of New Jersey in the U.S. Senate. In addition to writing five books on American politics, culture, and economy, he has also been an essayist for CBS evening news, a visiting professor, and a Rhodes Scholar. He wrote the foreword to the paperback edition of *Lives on the Line: American Families and the Struggle to Make Ends Meet*, which NCCP authored for Westview Press in 1999.

To her new job as director of the District of Columbia's Child and Family Services Agency, **Olivia Golden, Ph.D.**, brings over seven years of experience with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, first as commissioner on children, youth, and families beginning in 1993 and finally as assistant secretary for children and families from 1997–2000, where she oversaw more than 60 federal programs that address the economic well-being and healthy development of children and families, including welfare reform, Early Head Start, and Head Start, and instituted the Child Care Bureau as a new conduit for child care policy. Previously, Dr. Golden was director of programs and policy for the Children's Defense Fund, a lecturer at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, and, in Massachusetts, budget director of its Executive Office of Human Services, a candidate for the Senate, and chair of the Cambridge Advisory Committee on Children and Youth. Her 1992 book, *Poor Children and Welfare Reform*, focused on the way services work for children and families.

**Dr. Ron Haskins** has extensive knowledge of how legislation is created and passed from his 14 years as a staff member and then staff director of the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources where he was a major architect of the 1996 welfare overhaul. He edited the Committee's annual *Green Book*, a 1600-page compendium of data on the nation's social programs. He is currently a co-director of The Brookings Institution's Welfare Reform and Beyond Initiative and a senior fellow in its Economic Studies Program, and a senior consultant at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. In 1997, Dr. Haskins was selected by the National Journal as one of the 100 most influential people in the federal government. He has also been a senior researcher at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina and a research professor. His latest books include *The New World of Welfare* (Brookings, forthcoming 2001) and *Policies for America's Public Schools: Teachers, Equity, and Indicators*.

# Publications of Note

*This column highlights recent publications recommended for program administrators and policymakers by the Center's program and communications staff.* ***Documents should be ordered directly from the publishers listed.***

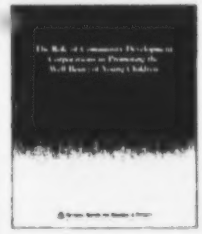
☐ **A good beginning: Sending America's children to school with the social and emotional competence they need to succeed,** prepared for the Child Mental Health Foundations and Agencies Network (FAN), by Robin Peth-Peirce. This report addresses the implications of early childhood development and school readiness for successful transition into kindergarten and later educational and workplace accomplishments, and it explores the gaps between present research findings and practice. Risk factors for difficult school transitions and early school failure can be seen in characteristics of individual children and also in the facets of the environments in which they develop. The author stresses the need to include consideration of school and daycare settings, community, family, peers, and neighborhood in addition to factors such as socioeconomic status, poor cognitive functioning, and low birthweight. The causal risk factors for early school failure that have been identified, she notes, indicate the importance of a child's ability to develop and maintain early relationships with peers, parents, and teachers. Current federal policies can improve the transition to school and early educational outcomes, she says, by encouraging increased communication between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners; fully implementing existing programs and exchanging information across disciplines; and considering the overburdened existing systems through which these programs will be implemented. She calls for further research to better understand the roles that protective factors and intervention programs can play in influencing early school outcomes. (2000; 22 pp.; Free, paper and Web versions)
*The National Institute of Mental Health, Office of Communications and Public Liaison, 6001 Executive Boulevard, Room 8184, MSC 9663, Bethesda, MD 20892-9663; (301) 443-4513/Fax: (301) 443-4279/E-mail: C-CAR@mail.nih.gov/Web: http://www.nimh.nih.gov/childhp/fdnconsb.htm*

☐ **Ending welfare as we know it,** by R. Kent Weaver. This book details the political and social trends that contributed to the 1996 comprehensive welfare reform legislation. The author contends that dramatic changes in the welfare reform agenda changed the substance of proposed legislation during the early 1990s, even if the outcomes looked similar to the proposals seen over the course of three decades. He places the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in the context of 30 years of political debate on the need for welfare reform and the path it should take, widespread public dissatisfaction with welfare, electoral politics in action, and the developing public concern over changing trends in American family structure. Broad societal forces and political institutions, he says, including policy research on poverty and welfare, public opinion, interest groups, and the struggles and interactions between the Clinton Administration and the new Congress, contributed to the change in welfare law. The author claims the interplay of the political and social debates that drove the course of welfare reform demonstrates a relational bargaining process that is a central feature of American policymaking. He stresses that we must wait to evaluate welfare reform efforts until TANF time limits and an economic recession indicate how people do when jobs are more difficult to attain; the new welfare policies of 1996 have not depoliticized welfare reform and the ultimate direction that welfare will take will be debated by the states when TANF is reauthorized in 2002. (2000, 482 pp.; $19.95)
*The Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 797-6000/Fax: (202) 797-6004/E-mail: brookinfo@brook.edu/Web: www.brookings.edu.*

☐ **Financing child care in the United States: An expanded catalog of current strategies, 2001 edition,** by Anne Mitchell, Louise Stoney, and Harriet Dichter. An updated version of the 1997 catalog, this volume surveys strategies for financing child care in use in the United States. With updates of 26 profiled programs from 1997 and 78 new profiles, the catalog seeks to share information on innovative funding methods and to encourage the development of new strategies using lessons from existing programs and examinations of methods used in other fields. The financial methods utilized by the programs are classified as generating public revenue, allocating private revenue, private sector financing, and public-private partnerships. The program profiles include amount of funding generated, when the financial strategy was initiated, method of fund distribution, types of services offered, and eligibility requirements. The authors explore the contextual factors that contributed to the success of programs with each financial strategy and provide participant analysis and advice for each funding approach. They highlight untested models for financing child care, drawing on methods used in other arenas such as higher education and unemployment compensation, and propose developing strategic alliances to obtain economies of scale. (2001, 186 pp.; Free, paper and Web versions)
*Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 4801 Rockhill Road, Kansas City, MO 64110-2046; (816) 932-1000/Fax: (816) 221-0021/E-mail: fplus@swbell.net/Web: http://www.emkf.org/pages/11.cfm*

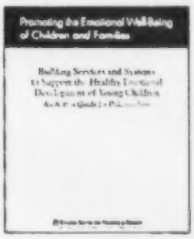
☐ **Handbook of early childhood intervention, 2nd edition,** edited by Jack P. Shonkoff and Samuel J. Meisels. This edition, like the first, facilitates communication across disciplines and perspectives within the early childhood field by addressing the science, policy, and practice of early childhood intervention, but adds a new chapter on early childhood mental health issues. It outlines developing areas of knowledge such as community characteristics, early childhood, mental health, and the neurobiology of early intervention. Although specialists within the field have grappled with conclusive findings on the valve of early intervention in combating the negative effects of poverty on young children, the authors maintain that the quality of a young child's environment plays a critical role in influencing future learning and emotional development. They assert that a clearer picture of general program efficacy is available and with that the major task of finding which programs work best and identifying the components that make a program work lies ahead. They describe how early intervention benefits extend to the community, citing the benchmark Perry Preschool Project study that identified a $7 savings for every dollar spent on the program. (2000, 734 pp.; Cloth, $100; Paper, $34.95)
*Cambridge University Press, 40 West 20th St, New York, NY 10011-4211; (800) 872-7423/Fax: (914) 937-4712/E-mail: orders@cup.org/Web: http://us.cambridge.org/*

## NEW Publications from NCCP



☐ **Role of Community Development Corporations in Promoting the Well-Being of Young Children.** J. Knitzer and F. Adely. Describes child development and family support strategies being used by nine community development corporations (CDCs) across the country to promote the healthy development of low-income young children and families. Suggests further roles for CDCS at the community, regional, and national levels to develop and implement child and family policies that benefit low-income families. (January 2002). 24 pp. $5.00.

☐ **Lack of Appropriate Research Leads to Gaps in Kowledge About Children in Immigrant Families.** The winter issue of the quarterly newsletter from the NCCP Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism describes what is known about immigrant families with children. The issue underscores the growing importance of children in immigrant families and the high occurrence of poverty among them compared to U.S.-born families, despite the strong work ethic of their parents. *the forum*. (February 2002). 6 pp. FREE.



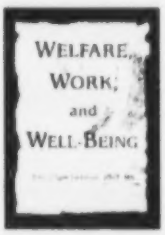

☐ **Promoting the Emotional Well-Being of Children and Families, Policy Paper No. 1: Building Services and Systems to Support the Healthy Emotional Development of Young Children—An Action Guide for Policymakers.** J. Knitzer. Describes systemic ways to promote healthy emotional development in young children for policymakers who want to develop new policies and practices. Provides basic information about what kind of help is needed, the systems challenges, and how to develop needed services and infrastructure at the community and state levels. (December 2001). 28 pp. $5.00.

☐ **Promoting the Emotional Well-Being of Children and Families, Policy Paper No. 2: Improving the Odds for the Healthy Development of Young Children in Foster Care.** S. Dicker, E. Gordon, and J. Knitzer. Focuses on what government agencies, the courts, and other partners can do to improve the physical, developmental, and emotional health of young children in foster care—a particularly vulnerable population of children. (October 2001). 28 pp. $5.00.

☐ **Policies Affecting New York City's Low-Income Families—Executive Summary.** H. O'Neill, K. Garcia, V. Amerlynck, and B. Blum. Reviews important federal, state, and local policy and program changes affecting New York City's low-income families, how they were implemented, and what issues need to be addressed as 41,000 of New York City's welfare recipients reach their five-year individual federal lifetime limit for cash assistance and more children without a parent are entering the city's welfare rolls. (September 2001). FREE.

**FROM OTHER PUBLISHERS**

☐ **Child Poverty in the U.S.: An Evidence-Based Conceptual Framework for Programs and Policies.** E. T. Gershoff, J. L. Aber, and C. C. Raver. Book chapter from NCCP and University of Chicago staff considers developmental mechanisms through which family economic hardship may translate into negative consequences for children and develops a framework to assess how diverse U.S. family- and child-focused federal programs have attempted to address poverty's effects on children. See *Promoting Positive Child, Adolescent, and Family Development: A Handbook of Program and Policy Innovations*. R. Lerner, F. Jacobs, and D. Wertlieb (Eds.). (Forthcoming spring 2002). Chapter available at http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/GARchap.html




☐ **Work, Welfare, and Well-Being.** M. C. Lennon. Leading scientists discuss the issues and challenges faced by low-income women in an era of major policy transformations and draw connections between the psychological and economic well-being of poor women and their families. Topics include food insufficiency, homelessness, material hardship, domestic violence, feelings of hopelessness, depression, and chronic trauma. Edited by NCCP's director of Social Science Research. Published as a book by Haworth Medical Press and as two special issues of *Women & Health*, Vol. 32, Nos. 1–2 and No. 3. (July 2001).

***Prices include postage and handling. Prepayment or purchase order required. Make checks payable to Columbia University and mail to: NCCP, 154 Haven Avenue, New York, NY 10032-1180, or fax your purchase order to (212) 544-4200 or 544-4201, or e-mail to nccp@columbia.edu.***

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# News & Issues

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## Framing the PRWORA/TANF Reauthorization Debate

by J. Lawrence Aber

The reform of welfare reform, or less grandly, the reauthorization of the legislation known as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) —that created a block grant to the states, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which replaced the previous welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)—is headed down the homestretch. House action this spring and Senate action this summer will likely yield bills to be resolved by conference committee after Labor Day. Six years of state efforts at experimentation and implementation, six years of national efforts at rigorous research and policy analysis, media attention, and political and citizen advocacy and debate have gone into the reconsideration of PRWORA. Consequently, this is perhaps one of the most closely scrutinized pieces of social legislation affecting low-income families with children in modern American history.

In this issue, NCCP highlights work by its own staff and by several colleagues relevant to the reauthorization debate itself and/or to the task of states implementing the new federal legislation in the context of a broader agenda to reduce child poverty and to promote family economic security.

### New Goals for Reauthorized TANF

If you read only one article in this edition, read "Making TANF Work Better for Children." While the national welfare rolls have been cut in half since the mid-1990's, then as today, two-thirds of the recipients of welfare are children. Whereas children were barely considered by most policymakers during the last national debate, the policy proposals developed by the Bush White House, and largely codified in the House bill, posit as the overarching purpose of welfare reform "to increase the flexibility of states in operating a program designed to improve the well-being of children." Michael Laracy of the Annie E. Casey Foundation lays out a set of ideas about how the new legislation should be crafted to increase child well-being; the most important involves restructuring TANF "to strongly encourage states to adopt welfare-to-work models that increase family incomes and reward moms for going to work." Welfare reform strategies that lead to increases in family incomes also lead to improvements in child outcomes, according to recent rigorous research.

*Welfare reform strategies that lead to increases in family incomes also lead to improvements in child outcomes, according to recent rigorous research.*

Indeed, NCCP's Research Forum has been promoting and monitoring rigorous research on income security strategies since before PRWORA was passed. In the chart "What Welfare Research Tells Us For Reauthorizing TANF," Barbara Blum and her Forum staff describe research findings synthesized across a broad range of studies and match them to specific reauthorization issues.

### Most Vulnerable Families At Risk

Since the mid-1990's, welfare rolls have declined and, happily, so has the

(continued on page 2)

**Framing the PRWORA/TANF** *(continued from page 1)*

national child poverty rate. While there is broad agreement on these facts, there is much scientific and political debate over the degree to which: (1) PRWORA legislation and state efforts, (2) the super performance of the national economy, and/or (3) other changes in national policy, specifically a significant expansion in the value of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, get the credit for inducing progress.

But available evidence suggests that the progress to date has not been even for all low-income families with children. In "Will TANF Reauthorization Help More Vulnerable Families," NCCP's deputy director, Jane Knitzer, answers that "welfare reform needs further 'reform' to achieve this goal." The article describes the very high rates of key adult barriers to employment: mental health problems, drug abuse, serious domestic violence, and very low literacy, and how they constrain children's health, development, and readiness for school.

Based on our research, NCCP has three simple messages to the Senators still debating reauthorization legislation and to the House/Senate conference that will be charged with resolving differences this fall:

- *Remember the children.* They are more than two-thirds of the caseload and promoting their well-being should be the overarching purpose of welfare reform.
- *Income matters.* Welfare reform that leads to more work must lead to higher family incomes if parents' greatest priorities—their children—are to benefit.
- *Continue to reform welfare until it works for everyone.* Especially consider the most vulnerable families.

## Post-TANF Policies for Low-Income Families

The last decade of welfare reform initiatives make two points crystal clear: (1) it is possible to reform welfare policies to promote work, independence, family economic security, and child well-being; and (2) to achieve the overarching goals of moving families out of poverty and improve the well-being of low-income children and their parents, welfare reform is not enough. Nothing less than a very broad-based set of family investment strategies will get us to where we want and need to go.

Two articles address this challenge. Lisa Harker, deputy director of England's Institute for Public Policy Research, tells the fascinating story of how poverty reduction became a formal national goal and program in the United Kingdom and the difficulties measuring progress. There is much to learn about the role of leadership from this example. NCCP senior policy analyst Nancy Cauthen introduces readers to a new policy brief series, "Improving Children's Economic Security." Her central message is that a broad range of public policies plays key roles in promoting family economic security. Like the Forum syntheses and NCCP's "Children and Welfare Reform" issue briefs, the new "series seeks to make accessible complex research findings and is aimed at state policymakers, advocates, and others who can influence state policy."

When TANF is reauthorized, the action will again reside primarily at state (and local) levels. Both a broader vision to promote family economic security and child well-being and a set of research-tested strategies are the critical tools needed to complete the unfinished agenda of welfare reform. ■

# What Welfare Research Tells Us for Reauthorizing TANF

*Note: The rigorous research on the impact of welfare reform across the United States provides many guidelines for the current debate on how to reauthorize TANF. The following chart provides a summary of the research findings that should help inform the debate and guide future research. It was compiled by NCCP's Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism. For other matrices related to PRWORA reauthorization and detailed documentation, see the Research Forum's Web site:* ***www.researchforum.org****.*

| REAUTHORIZATION ISSUE | RELATED RESEARCH EVIDENCE |
|---|---|
| **Goals of PRWORA** | |
| • Provide support to poor families so that children may be cared for in their own or relatives' homes.<br>• Promote job preparation, work, and marriage to reduce receipt of government benefits.<br>• Prevent and reduce the number of nonmarital pregnancies.<br>• Promote the formation and stability of two-parent families. | • *Support for children.* Assistance is provided to children in caseloads meeting TANF requirements. However, a large number of children in immigrant families are not assisted, even when eligible. While no significant increases in foster care placement have occurred, child-only cases are becoming a larger proportion of the shrinking welfare caseload. But child poverty rates do continue to decline.<br>• *Dependence on public benefits.* Caseloads relying on public assistance (such as TANF and food stamps) have decreased dramatically; reductions in benefit expenditures have mirrored these reductions. Increases in numbers of workers employed (even with recent declines reflecting a short recession) substantiate the movement of welfare recipients off the cash assistance rolls.<br>• *Teenage issues.* The reduction in teen birth rates (which began prior to 1996) continues. Insufficient data is available concerning living arrangements and school attendance for adolescent parents.<br>• *Marriage.* While increased marriage rates are not significant, slight decreases in divorce rates continue (this trend began before 1996). In addition, small reductions in the number of households headed by a single parent are emerging. With regard to family formation, however, there is conflicting evidence about the impact of the Family Cap provisions of PRWORA. |

| REAUTHORIZATION ISSUE | RELATED RESEARCH EVIDENCE |
|---|---|
| **TANF Requirements** | |
| ***Work Requirements***<br>Within 24 months, work is required for TANF clients receiving assistance:<br>• States must ensure participation rates of 50 percent by fiscal year 2002, based on caseload reductions.<br>• Single-parents are required to work 30 hours/week.<br>• Up to 20 percent of participants can be exempted from requirements. | • Increased participation in the work force is evident. Uniformly, studies indicate that most individuals leaving TANF for employment are in low-wage jobs. Studies of "leavers" also show that those with limited education and/or other problems are most likely to return to the TANF caseload.<br>• Work participation rates of TANF clients will be the subject of reauthorization debate. The current requirement of 50 percent is discounted by caseload reductions that reduce state benchmarks. Currently, because of drastic caseload reductions, some states have very minimal participation requirements. Hours worked by TANF participants who remain on the rolls tend to be less than full-time. The earned income disregard provision is extraordinarily important for these workers.<br>• For other workers who are employed full-time and no longer TANF clients, the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) plays a similarly important role. However, unemployment insurance policies have not been adapted to accommodate low-wage workers. |
| ***Time Limits***<br>• Maximum of five years of federal assistance. States may shorten eligibility period. | • Early in TANF implementation, considerable confusion existed about time limits both for participants and staff. Recent studies indicate negative effects on working families cut off from TANF income supplements.<br>• Some child outcomes are also negatively affected. |
| ***Sanctions***<br>• For individuals not meeting the work requirements, full or partial sanctions may be imposed. | • Sanctioned families are seriously at risk. These families tend to be cases where the parent may be poorly equipped (due to mental illness, developmental disability, physical disability, or substance abuse) to comply with TANF requirements. Clearly, children in these cases are affected. |
| **Populations Affected** | |
| ***Children*** | • While most children have not been harmed by the changes in welfare policy, children in households where income is supplemented when work is mandated show improved outcomes.<br>• There is increased investment in child care using TANF funds as well as Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCBG) funds. It is less clear whether the increase has been adequate to meet increased needs.<br>• The State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) has increased access to health care for poor children; enhanced Child Support Enforcement provisions have provided additional income to significant numbers of families with dependent children.<br>• Research on child outcomes should focus on: (1) child-only cases; (2) the effects of work requirements on adolescents and their parents; (3) the effects of work requirements on infants and toddlers; and (4) the role of after-school programs on behavioral/cognitive measures. |
| ***Immigrant Populations*** | • Immigrant populations are understudied, but we know that children in these families need a range of interventions.<br>• As a result of welfare reform, lack of United States citizenship has become a potential risk factor for children in immigrant families.<br>• Policies need to be administered to ensure eligible children have access to benefits. |
| ***Disabled Individuals*** | • Both parents and children in families with a disabled individual may require extra assistance.<br>• Parents may be mentally ill, developmentally disabled, physically disabled, or substance abusers.<br>• Children may be developmentally disabled, emotionally disturbed, or physically ill. |
| ***Native Americans*** | • More coordination is needed between state agencies and tribal welfare-to-work programs.<br>• Education and training components may be needed to supplement the Work-First approach.<br>• Tribal welfare-to-work programs can support the economic development of tribes. |
| ***Rural Populations*** | • Rural welfare recipient populations are more likely to be employed, to be married, and to be non-Hispanic white than recipients in urban areas.<br>• Rural welfare leavers face mixed employment prospects, may receive lower incomes, and have greater problems with transportation than their urban counterparts. |
| ***Urban Populations*** | • Because cities are responsible for a largest proportion of the welfare caseload, they have special problems, including lack of affordable housing, greater costs of living, and higher crime rates.<br>• These issues, plus barriers to employment, such as inability to access metropolitan job markets and lack of education, may contribute to slower caseload declines. |
| **Administrative Issues** | |
| • These include issues related to funding, flexibility, management information systems (MIS) and information technology, and implementation. | • PRWORA funding has been used creatively, and for the most part, well especially to expand child care and supplement income through enhanced earned income disregards, but more flexibility is needed.<br>• MIS and information technology are being ignored. Far more information needs to be collected and shared across domains.<br>• Research on implementation issues is needed to plan for the next generation of changes in social policy. |


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VIEW FROM THE FIELD—THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

# Making TANF Work Better for Children

*by Michael C. Laracy*

*Editor's Note: With this issue, NCCP introduces a new column featuring the opinions of prominent foundations, the work they are supporting, and their goals in relation to the specific topic of* News & Issues. *NCCP believes the role of foundations is very important in our nation's efforts to reduce child poverty and improve the lives of the millions of children in the United States that live in low-income families. We begin with the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF).*

*Michael C. Laracy has been Senior Associate at the Casey Foundation since 1994; he is responsible for AECF's initiatives and grant-making agenda in income security. Previously, he was assistant commissioner for Policy, Planning, and Program Evaluation in the New Jersey Department of Human Services for 17 years.*

**About the Annie E. Casey Foundation**

*AECF's primary mission is to build better futures for the millions of American children at risk for poor educational, economic, social, and health outcomes. AECF has assets of about $3 billion and spends about $185 million annually in three areas: reforming public systems; promoting accountability and innovation in policy; and transforming tough neighborhoods into family-supporting communities.*

**AECF Contributions to Understanding and Changing Policies for Low-Income Families**

Under Michael Laracy's guidance, AECF has supported the development of the following initiatives:

- Welfare Information Network
- Urban Institute's Assessing the New Federalism initiative measuring the consequences of the national devolution to the states of social supports for low-income families
- Evaluation of strategies that use financial incentives and income supplements—such as the EITC—to "make wages work" for low-skilled workers
- A strategy for deliberating Congressional reauthorization of the 1996 welfare reforms
- Crafting of new income security and support systems for low-income working families, including income tax reform—most notably the expansion of the federal EITC and Child Tax Credit in early 2001—and unemployment insurance reform

Until now, the nation's welfare reform debate has been about reducing dependence, encouraging work, and promoting family formation. Today, thanks to President Bush, we have an exceptional opportunity to focus welfare reform on improving the well-being of America's poor children—an opportunity we can't let pass.

At the Annie E. Casey Foundation, we are deeply concerned with how children fare under welfare reform. We believe three Bush proposals bear particular scrutiny:

- Emphasizing the improvement of child well-being as the primary goal of TANF;
- Imposing much stricter work requirements on states and participants; and
- Earmarking TANF resources to make marriage and family formation a higher priority.

## Improving Child Well-Being Primary Goal

Perhaps the most promising—and most overlooked—aspect of the President's plan was in amending the overall goal of TANF "to increase the flexibility of states in operating a program *designed to improve the well-being of children* . . . ." (author's emphasis).

For good reason, the Casey Foundation enthusiastically applauds this proposal. At its core, welfare has always been about ensuring the well-being of disadvantaged children. The Bush proposal affirms this goal, and that everything else should support that purpose and be judged on how much it helps or hurts poor children.

How does the Congress make the President's laudable language more than heart-warming rhetoric?

- Build on the Casey Foundation's 11-year-old KIDS COUNT initiative by directing the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to convene an expert panel to adopt a set of indicators of child well-being—outcomes likely to be affected by welfare reform—as the formal measure of TANF's success or failure. Obvious choices include the number of children living in poverty, lacking health insurance, or suffering hunger.
- Fund a national survey in each state to assess the child well-being outcomes of a reauthorized PRWORA to allow us to hold states accountable for their TANF decisions. It could build on existing surveys and should oversample low-income populations, examine a wide variety of family and child conditions, and measure fairly subtle changes. TANF already provides $10 million annually for the national Survey of Program Dynamics, or the Urban Institute's National Survey of America's Families could be expanded to every state.
- Recognize that TANF has become, in effect, "Transitional Assistance for Working Families." While more than three-quarters of welfare funds before 1996 went toward cash assistance for dependent families, under TANF, almost three-quarters go toward supports for families in the work force.
- Let states provide cash assistance to legal immigrant families without waiting five years. This puts the children at needless risk when hard times come.

## Impose More Work Requirements

Undoubtedly, the most controversial piece of the President's reauthorization proposal—one that has sparked vigorous protest from states and advocates—

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# Will TANF Reauthorization Help More Vulnerable Families?

There is growing consensus that one of the overarching goals of the Temporary Assistant for Needy Families welfare block grant to the states (TANF) should be to promote child well-being. But research on the kinds of families not faring well under current TANF regulations and the affects on their children show that welfare reform needs further "reform" to achieve this goal, says NCCP deputy director Dr. Jane Knitzer.

Children in families where the adults face multiple barriers to work, especially barriers such as substance abuse, depression, and domestic violence, are the most vulnerable in society. "We know that children in families with adult barriers to employment are very likely to experience problems themselves and fare poorly," notes Dr. Knitzer. But much is known that might inform the next generation of strategies on behalf of these more vulnerable families.

TANF-linked research provides some insights about the prevalence rates of these barriers, and, to a lesser extent, their impact on employment. Typically the focus has been on single, rather than multiple risk factors, and there is little information about the educational or mental health status (or even the ages) of children in these families, explains Dr. Knitzer. Most of the larger experimental studies have conducted age-specific analyses, but not in relation to levels of risk in the family. While some studies look at how more vulnerable families are faring under TANF processes, particularly sanction policies, these do not usually identify specific risk factors.

The clearest information about the overlap among risk factors in the adults comes from studies by Sandra Danziger and her colleagues in Michigan, and by Dan Chandler and Joan Meisel in California. Across the two studies, between 25 to 35 percent of the samples have a major mental health issue; 14 to 36 percent experienced serious domestic violence; 6 to 18 percent abused alcohol and other drugs (AOD). Over half of the sample faced one of these risk factors, between one-fifth and one-third two risks, and 2 to 6 percent all three risk factors. These risk factors co-exist with others that pose threats to young children, particularly low maternal educational levels and the presence of learning disabilities.

"These studies are beginning to paint a sobering picture," laments Dr. Knitzer. For example, using data from the National Survey of America's Families (NASF), Child Trends found twice as many adolescents from recent welfare leaver families were suspended or expelled from school compared to other poor adolescents. Early findings from the Three-City Study suggest that preschoolers whose families are sanctioned do significantly more poorly on cognitive tasks and exhibit more behavioral problems than other young children.

**Prevalence of Parental Risk Factors Likely to Negatively Impact Young Children's Development**

In a sample of over 700 women transitioning from welfare to work:*

- 32 percent had less than a high school education (compared with 13 percent nationally).
- 25 percent had a major depressive disorder (compared with 13 percent nationally).
- 22 percent had a child with a significant health problem (compared with 16 percent nationally).
- 20 percent had their own significant health problem.
- 15 percent had experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (the same rate as national estimates).
- 15 percent had experienced an anxiety disorder (compared with 4.3 percent nationally).
- 15 percent had experienced domestic violence (compared with 3 percent nationally).
- 15 percent had low work experience.
- 6 percent experienced alcohol or drug dependence (the same rate as national estimates).

* Danziger, S.; Corcoran, M.; Danziger, S.; Heflin, C.; Kalil, A.; Levine, J.; Rosen, D.; Seefidlt, K.; Siefert, K.; & Toman, R. O. (2000). Barriers to the employment of welfare recipients. In R. Cherry & W. M. Rogers (Eds.). *Prosperity for all: The economic boom and African Americans*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

## Multiple Risk Factors More Damaging

Developmental research tells an even clearer story about the impact of significant adult barriers to work on child well-being, emphasizes NCCP's director Dr. Larry Aber. "That research makes clear that the more risk factors children experience, absent countervailing protective factors, the greater the odds of poor outcomes, marked by school failure and adolescent high-risk behavior," he says. Research also documents the special burdens of children impacted by parental mental health challenges, particularly depression, as well as substance abuse and domestic violence, adds Dr. Knitzer. These children may have developmental delays; symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder; difficult behaviors as infants, toddlers and preschoolers; poor health; difficulty in relating to peers; and as adolescents, vulnerability to alcohol, tobacco, drugs and substance abuse. One study, for example, finds that children of depressed parents are themselves eight times as likely to develop depression, five times more likely to develop conduct disorders, and three times more likely to develop anxiety disorders.

## Successful Strategies are Two-Generational

These data point to the importance in the TANF reauthorization debate of focusing not just on adult barriers to work, but on child risks as well, says Dr. Aber. Although there have been few randomized controlled trials of interventions, a review of integrated two-generation strategies suggests that adults need:

- Flexible individualized treatment and interventions responsive to one or a combination of risk factors coupled with employment-linked strategies.



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**Making TANF Work Better** *(continued from page 4)*

would significantly toughen TANF's already demanding work requirements in three ways:

- Require each state to increase its family work participation level—currently at 50 percent— by 5 percentage points per year to reach 70 percent in 2007.
- Rapidly phase out the credit for caseloads reduced, which currently lowers states' minimum required work participation rates. With national caseloads declining by more than half since 1995, some states effectively have almost no work participation standards.
- Require welfare-to-work mothers to work more hours each week—raising the 30-hour weekly "work-related activities" requirement to 40 hours of "constructive activities," at least 24 of those hours in actual work.

What such standards would mean for children is unsure, and the lessons from TANF and earlier state waiver projects are mixed. Separately, the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), the Children's Defense Fund, and Child Trends recently synthesized results of evaluations that included child outcomes.

In all three studies, income gains were the key factor in improving children's outcomes (such as higher school achievement, fewer behavioral problems, increased positive social behavior, or improved health). More important even than gains in employment, strong financial work incentives and supports were most responsible for increasing family income. Furthermore, every program that increased participants' incomes by 5 percent or more found at least one significantly improved child outcome. But adolescents may not be doing very well when their mothers leave home to go to work—they tend to achieve less in school and have more behavioral problems, perhaps because they are caring for younger siblings.

How should the Congress act in light of these findings?

- *First, do no harm.* Either adopt less ambitious—and less risky—standards for work requirements or rigorously test the proposed work requirements in several demonstrations before imposing them nationwide.
- *Second, restructure TANF to strongly encourage states to adopt welfare-to-work models that increase family incomes and reward moms for going to work.* A prime example is the "stop-the-clock" provision that allows participants to keep some supplemental TANF cash benefits when working in low-wage jobs without counting toward their 60-month TANF lifetime limit.
- *Third, allow TANF mothers to keep more child support.* This strategy encourages the absent parent to pay child support, because the money would go to his child, and the custodial parent to work.
- *Fourth, authorize more dollars for high quality child care, after-school programs, youth development programs, and related interventions.* These programs mitigate the effects of mothers' absence from the home.

**Selected NCCP Welfare Reform Projects Supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation**

- Childhood Poverty Research Briefs
- Children and Welfare Reform Issue Briefs
- Map and Track: State Initiatives to Encourage Responsible Fatherhood
- Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism

## Marriage and Family Formation Higher Priority

Responding to public concerns about family breakdown, three of the four purposes of TANF refer to marriage and family formation. But states have done relatively little to implement programs aimed at these goals. The Bush Administration has sought to make marriage more central in welfare reform through several reauthorization proposals.

Clearly, the Administration's focus has merit in terms of child well-being. But, marrying will not magically raise a family out of poverty when the parents often have no skills, no jobs, and terrible housing and may struggle with depression, substance abuse, or domestic violence. And while there is ample research on the causes of marital decline, the benefits of marriage, and what makes relationships succeed, this knowledge has rarely been translated into programs that strengthen couples and marriage. The federal government's primary roles at this point should be to gather better data and encourage states to launch demonstration programs, as they did with welfare recipients in the decade before TANF.

A few other recommendations:

- While converting the failed $100 million illegitimacy bonus fund into a source of support for pilot programs around marriage and family formation is sensible, it would be a mistake to take $100 million from the high-performance bonuses. These bonuses work well and encourage states to pursue policies geared toward increasing family income and improving retention. To divert these funds toward marriage invites a counterproductive battle between liberals and conservatives.
- A healthy marriage and two biological parents are an ideal that should not preclude other family structures that can improve the well-being of children.
- For some, the most productive approach might be to increase father-engagement without pushing hard for marriage. The Senate should target at least a quarter of the earmarked funds to such efforts.
- Finally, funding appropriate agencies to resume gathering state-level statistics on marriage and divorce shows we are serious about addressing a social problem.

Taking steps such as these to improve the TANF reauthorization legislation would put a decidedly pro-child stamp on the welfare plan President Bush proposed. It would put real substance behind the laudable—and, I believe, attainable—goal of improving the well-being of poor children in America. ■

POLICY POINT OF VIEW

# Anti-Poverty Program Makes Progress in United Kingdom

*by Lisa Harker*

*Lisa Harker, who visited NCCP for consultation this winter, is deputy director at the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) where she oversees its research program and day-to-day management. She has been U.K. Advocacy Coordinator at Save the Children and previously worked for BBC News as Social Affairs Specialist and as Campaigns Team Coordinator at Child Poverty Action Group. Her publications include:* The Family-Friendly Employer: Examples from Europe; A Secure Future: Social Security and the Family in a Changing World; *and* Poverty: The Facts.

***The combination of the welfare to work, welfare reform, and broader public service anti-poverty agendas has resulted in the United Kingdom's most ambitious anti-poverty program for decades.***

Had you chosen to take a holiday in London in April 2002 you would have come away with the distinct impression that the British government had spectacularly failed to do enough to reduce child poverty, despite its grand promises. Prompted by the release of annual poverty statistics, the newspaper headlines were united in their criticism of Tony Blair and New Labour.

But this is a far more complicated story than the newspaper headlines suggest; much progress has been made in reducing child poverty in the past five years, but the improvements have not kept up with expectations.

## Sudden Interest in Fighting Poverty

Despite substantial increases in relative poverty since 1980—an extraordinary growth by international standards whereby child poverty increased from 1:10 to 1:3—when New Labour came to power in 1997 it had no anti-poverty strategy. Instead government officials stressed the need to tackle "social exclusion," a far wider set of challenges than income poverty.

Then, in March 1999, by Tony Blair rather unexpectedly pledged to eradicate child poverty. In a bold and ambitious lecture he said: "Our historic aim will be for ours to be the first generation to end child poverty, and it will take a generation. It is a 20-year mission, but I believe it can be done." Blair's pledge was seen as one of the most politically significant commitments of Labour's first term. Anyone who doubted his sincerity was reassured by the setting of more specific "public service agreements" to halve the child poverty rate in 10 years and reduce it by one quarter by 2004.

## Measures Cover Work, Services, Child Outcomes

Overnight the term poverty was rehabilitated and tackling poverty became a key government objective. During the first two years, fearful of losing support from "middle England," New Labour was nervous about adopting an explicit anti-poverty agenda. But from 1999 onwards, signs of a more overtly social democratic government started to emerge, with traditional social justice objectives gaining greater prominence.

The raft of measures introduced by New Labour in its first five years in power fall into four broad categories:

- Improve opportunities to work.
- Make work pay.
- Provide greater security for those outside work;
- Improve public services.

***Opportunities to work.*** New Labour's welfare-to-work measures were particularly high profile during the early part of its first term. Various "New Deals" were introduced to provide targeted, more personalized support to help certain groups gain employment: young people, single parents, the over 50s, the long-term unemployed, the disabled, and partners of the unemployed. A National Child Care Strategy was launched to increase child care provision. In addition, based on European directives, parental and paternity leaves were introduced and employment rights were improved for part-time workers.

***Making work pay.*** New measures help ensure that individuals are better off taking a job than remaining out of the labor market. A minimum wage was introduced in 1999. Changes were made to the tax and benefit system; modelled after the U.S. federal Earned Income Tax Credit, the Working Families Tax Credit targets low-income families with a full-time worker. Subsequent extensions have broadened its reach. From 2003, low-income full-time workers without children will be eligible.

***Security for those out of work.*** While "work" dominated New Labour's policy agenda, other changes were introduced by stealth to redistribute resources to the poorest families. Child benefit and child-related allowances were increased by 80 percent between 1997 and 2001.

***New services.*** Finally, new services were introduced with an explicit anti-poverty agenda. Sure Start, an early-intervention program that draws lessons from High Scope and Head Start in the United States, was

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**Anti-Poverty Program Makes Progress** *(continued from page 7)*

established in deprived areas, alongside other area-based programs such as the Neighborhood Renewal initiative.

Many of the academics and commentators who criticized previous governments for their failure to tackle poverty have expressed warm support for New Labour's efforts. Lobby groups are working to maintain and increase the momentum, rather than having to try to kick-start the process.

## Gauging Success Is Difficult and Controversial

In last year's general election—and in frustration at the delay in getting accurate statistics showing progress—New Labour estimated that it had already lifted 1.2 million children out of poverty. Child advocates were privately acknowledging that the government seemed well on the way to achieving its interim target of lifting one quarter of children out of poverty by 2004.

But when the annual poverty statistics were released in April, they told a very different story; around 500,000 children had escaped poverty since 1997—less than half as many as the government had claimed.

***Why the discrepancy?*** Using a relative measure of poverty (those living in households with income below 60 percent of the median) means that progress is judged against a moving target. Despite substantial redistribution to the poor, and incomes improving in real terms, the continuing rise of average incomes faster than low incomes has meant that relative poverty has remained stubbornly high.

There are many ways to measure progress towards reducing poverty. New Labour has developed 50 measures of poverty and social exclusion for its annual poverty report.

***Opportunity for all.*** The 60 percent median measure has become the default headline measure used by government divisions and the media to gauge progress. It is a widely supported measure because it reflects the fact that poverty is a relative concept, that you judge your living standards in society against those around you.

But the measure does have limitations. In addition to the paradox that poverty can rise when living standards are improving, where you draw the line is arbitrary (e.g., at 50 percent or 60 percent). It is also a snap shot measure that captures some people who are poor for short periods of time but may have substantial savings to live on.

Last month the British government announced that it was beginning a consultation process to discuss changes to the way child poverty is measured. Inevitably the government was accused of attempting to move the goal posts. But while the timing was bad, the intention was honorable and had come from more than 18-months work inside government, well before the disappointing progress was known.

## Poverty Index to Include Nonmonetary Items

The task for government is to identify a headline measure of child poverty that is both credible and sufficiently transparent to gain public support. One option is to combine a relative income measure with a nonmonetary deprivation index—a measure which shows that people are lacking essential items such as not being able to afford clothes, two pairs of shoes, or a warm overcoat. Those who are relatively poor by income standards and lacking in basic necessities are deemed to be poor. This type of poverty measure has already been adopted in Ireland.

There is little evidence that the public will continue to support the government's efforts to tackle poverty. A recent survey found that while 62 percent of the British public believe that there is "quite a lot" of poverty in the United Kingdom, some 58 percent believe poverty has either decreased or stayed at the same level in the past 10 years; only 37 percent believe it increased.

The British government has taken considerable strides in attempting to tackle child poverty and has started to reverse a 30-year old trend of rising relative poverty. But undertaking redistribution by stealth is a dead-end strategy in this regard. For government to increase its anti-poverty efforts in the face of competition for resources to improve public services, it will need to have an honest dialogue with the electorate to establish a consensus on how we should measure its progress. ■

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**Will TANF Reauthorization Help** *(continued from page 5)*

- Assistance in meeting basic needs (especially food and housing).
- Help to repair or prevent damaged parent-child relationships and promote positive parenting. (Helping the adult alone will not address these issues.)

But children also have their own needs. These include:

- Health care and developmental screening.
- Access to quality care and early learning experiences (even more so for vulnerable children).
- Access to specialized services if necessary, such as early intervention.

Those administering TANF do not have to do this all alone, suggests Dr. Knitzer. It requires a family-focused approach to needs planning and new partnerships with the early childhood community. "The bottom line is that to date neither research nor implementation strategies have been informed by a most basic reality—for families facing AOD, depression or other mental health issues, or domestic violence, either singly or, as is more typical, in combination, it is not enough to address the adult barriers," she concludes. "It is imperative that in the future, strategies also focus on the needs of the children, especially the younger ones, since this group of children is among those least likely to enter school ready to succeed." For this group of children and families, promoting child well-being will require more than "business as usual." It will require a two-generation perspective. ■

# Public Policy Plays Key Role in Promoting Family Economic Security

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 changed the nature of cash assistance programs for low-income families, placing a strong emphasis on work and moving families into paid employment. This focus is likely to be maintained, and perhaps even strengthened, in coming years.

Observers across the political spectrum recognize, however, that low-wage employment—even if full-time—may be insufficient to meet a family's basic needs. This recognition is leading to new thinking about the role of government policies in helping low-income working families move toward economic security.

## What is "Family Economic Security?"

"NCCP defines 'family economic security' as a family's ability to meet its financial needs in a way that promotes the health and well-being of parents and their children in both the short and long term," explains Dr. Nancy Cauthen, a senior policy analyst at NCCP.

Income is the first and most basic component of family economic security, as it provides the means for families to meet day-to-day needs for housing, food, clothing, and other basic necessities. But families also need sufficient income to provide for more than current minimum needs to improve their financial prospects.

Amount is not the only attribute of income that matters. The stability and predictability of a family's income—for example, whether it is steady or intermittent, rises, falls, or is erratic over time—also matter.

The second component of family economic security—savings and assets—can help families survive a crisis (e.g., loss of a job, extended illness), plan for the future (e.g., education, retirement), and improve living standards (e.g., by purchasing a home in a safe neighborhood). Savings and assets can also indirectly increase family income or reduce expenses. For example, an asset such as a car can make it possible for a family member to obtain or maintain a job that would otherwise be inaccessible; owning a home can reduce regular monthly outlays. And investment of assets in education can improve family income by increasing earnings potential.

A third component—human and social capital—refers to education, skills, and employment experience, as well as less tangible resources such as social and professional networks. Human and social capital provide family members with the means to improve their earnings potential and ultimately to increase their standard of living over the long term—by increasing income and assets; by providing access to safe neighborhoods, enriching educational environments, and high-quality services (e.g., medical care); and by expanding networks, connections, and knowledge that help improve family financial status.

**Defining Family Economic Security**

Family economic security refers to a family's ability to meet its financial needs in a way that promotes the health and well-being of parents and their children in both the short and long term. Components include:

- Income
- Savings, assets, and other forms of wealth
- Human and social capital

## How Can Public Policies Help?

In April, NCCP released the first brief in a new policy series entitled *Improving Children's Economic Security: Research Findings on Increasing Parental Income through Employment*. According to Dr. Cauthen, author of the series, "The purpose of these new policy briefs is to synthesize research findings about the effectiveness of various public policies in increasing parental employment—either by increasing work incentives or minimizing work disincentives—and raising family income." The series seeks to make accessible complex research findings and is aimed at state policymakers, advocates, and others who seek to influence state policy.

The first brief, *Policies That Improve Family Income Matter for Children,* examines the relationship between family income and child well-being. A growing body of research suggests that helping low-income families increase their income—and to maintain higher, stable incomes over time—can improve child development outcomes. Conversely, income poverty is associated with a wide-ranging set of negative outcomes for children, including impeded cognitive development; behavioral, social, and emotional problems; and poor health.

The rest of the series will focus on individual policies that seek to increase family income in the short term by encouraging, supporting, and rewarding work. "Policy options for increasing family income *directly* include supplementing earnings (e.g., through state earned income tax credits), increasing wage rates (e.g., by raising minimum wage standards), or temporarily replacing earnings (e.g., through unemployment benefits or cash assistance)," Dr. Cauthen explains. "In-kind benefits—such as child care subsidies, housing assistance, public health insurance, and food stamps—increase family income *indirectly* by reducing family expenses. Recent research also indicates that such benefits may facilitate parental employment under certain circumstances."

Each brief will synthesize what is known from research about the effectiveness of a given policy to increase parental employment and family income. Some research findings have been consistently documented across a range of studies, says Dr. Cauthen. "For example,

(continued on page 11)

# Center News Briefs

- The third publication in NCCP's series: Promoting the Emotional Well-Being of Children and Families, is being released in June 2002. Entitled: *Ready to Enter: What Research Tells Policymakers About Strategies to Promote Social and Emotional School Readiness Among Three- and Four-Year-Old Children,* the policy paper highlights research findings about the relationship between early academic learning and emotional development; the prevalence of emotional problems in preschoolers and associated risk factors; the role of caregivers in reducing these problems; and the emerging research on preventive and early intervention strategies, particularly in early care and education settings.

- NCCP was part of the research team studying the dynamics of child care subsidy use in Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Texas and the factors associated with length of subsidy receipt and provider stability. A report: *The Dynamics of Child Care Subsidy Use: A Collaborative Study of Five States,* will be released in summer 2002. Subsequent reports will highlight findings in Illinois, Maryland, and Oregon. The researchers found that the exercise of policy discretion at the state level has produced very different child care subsidy programs in these states that serviced different populations, provided different services, and were characterized by short spells of subsidy receipt and considerable reentry to the subsidy system.

- A conference sponsored by NCCP's Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism: Relationships Between Child Welfare and Child Well-Being: A Research and Policy Discussion, in October 2001, concluded that TANF and PRWORA provisions have had negative effects on particularly vulnerable families—those receiving welfare that are also involved in the child welfare system. The participants explored research in progress on the interaction between welfare reform, child welfare systems, and child maltreatment, pondered what is known about these interactions, and identified research priorities. These families may not be helped as much as other welfare families by incentives to work; when they do work, it may be more difficult for them to keep their families together or reunite them. Especially lacking is research-based knowledge about what are causes and what are effects in these situations. The full conference report is available at **www.researchforum.org**.

- The May 2002 issue of ***the forum*** assesses whether the unemployment insurance (UI) program can serve as a safety net for former welfare recipients who lose their jobs. It describes research and policy reforms that could help make the UI program more effective in protecting low-income workers and simplifying the complex and variable UI regulations now existing across the states. See: **www.researchforum.org**.

- Recent guest speakers at NCCP:

  The nature of what children watch on television, rather than how much time is spent watching, is the key to understanding how television promotes stereotyping and violent behavior, says NCCP senior staff associate **Dr. Jennifer Kotler**, who talked on "Television and Children: Practices, Policies, and Protections" to NCCP staff recently. The average child views 100,000 acts of violence per year, including 8,000 murders. Violent viewing may encourage the use of aggression to solve problems, desensitize children to violence in the real world, and lead them to believe the world is a mean and dangerous place. Yet, the "Prosocial Television Project" confirms that television viewing can teach academic skills, build social and emotional skills—especially altruism—and help prepare young children for school. Proposals to decrease the influence of violence on television include reducing exposure to violent programming, e.g. through "safe haven" hours, increasing the quality and availability of educational programs, improving the ratings system, and encouraging parents to evaluate what their children are watching and view programs with them.

  **Dr. Hiro Yoshikawa**, a co-author of NCCP's 1997 work: *Lessons from the Field: Head Start Mental Health Strategies to Meet Changing Needs,* addressed the question: "Do the effects of welfare and anti-poverty policies on adults and children vary by parents' risk for unemployment?" Using a risk index incorporating data from MDRC's Next Generation project, which is examining the impact on children of 11 welfare programs operated over the last 15 years, he described how adults least likely to be employed are also least likely to benefit from welfare policies, especially their children. Despite increasing incomes, for the hardest to employ group of adults, the presence of maternal depression, short job duration or shift work, and unstable family routines appeared to counteract the benefits of welfare policies for children's development. More intensive family- and child-focused interventions that focus on job and family instability and parent mental health are especially needed for this group.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY
Mailman School of Public Health
Columbia University

J. Lawrence Aber *Director*
Jane Knitzer *Deputy Director*

*News & Issues, Spring/Summer 2002, Vol. 12, No. 2*
Carole J. Oshinsky *Managing Editor*
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# Publications of Note

*This column highlights recent publications based on welfare research recommended for program administrators and policymakers by the Center's program and communications staff.* ***Documents should be ordered directly from the publishers listed.***

- **Fragile families and welfare reform,** edited by Irwin Garfinkel, Sara S. McLanahan, Marta Tienda, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn. This double journal issue examines data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being study in progress in 20 U.S. cities to assess the effects of the 1996 welfare reform law on family formation, child support enforcement, and paternity establishment. The 13 papers attempt to answer questions about the resources and capabilities of parents affected by TANF, the nature of parents' relationships, the effects of father involvement on mothers and children, the diversity of policies and job market environments that determine the implementation of welfare reform, and the supports and outcomes of families who do not receive or who leave welfare. Thus far studies have found distinctive results for parents who are married, cohabitate, are romantically involved but live separately, or are uninvolved. The authors stress the importance and better outcomes of policies and programs that are designed to strengthen fragile families and agree with parents' own objectives for family formation. (*Children and Youth Services Review,* Volume 23, Numbers 4/5 and 6/7; April/May and June/July 2001; pp. 277-452 and 453-601; $81 per issue)
*Children and Youth Services Review, Elsevier Science, Inc., Regional Sales Office, Customer Support Department, P.O. Box 945, New York, NY 10159; (212) 663-3730 or (888) 437-4636/Fax: (212) 633-3680/ E-mail: usinfo-f@elsevier.com/Web: http://www.elsevier.nl/locate/ecresq.*

- **How children fare in welfare experiments appears to hinge on income,** by Arloc Sherman. To explore the effects of state welfare-to-work experiments on children's health and well-being, this report examines 16 local programs initiated in the early- to mid-1990's before enactment of PRWORA. These programs illustrate the wide range of approaches that states have incorporated in their welfare-to-work policies. The author demonstrates that the most successful programs for children are the ones that reward and encourage employment and improve parents' income levels and economic security. Although all the programs sought to encourage work, and most did succeed in raising employment, many did not succeed in increasing participants' incomes: some decreased family incomes; some increased the proportion of participants living in extreme poverty. The effects on children can be seen in school achievement, behavioral problems, mental health, overall health, and safety. The author found that every welfare-to-work program that increased participants' average incomes by at least 5 percent had mostly good effects on children, while programs that reduced income by at least 5 percent had mostly bad effects. The author urges policymakers to emphasize effects on income in addition to employment status in evaluating the types of welfare reform programs that help or hurt children. (2001, 26 pp.; Free paper or Web versions)
*Children's Defense Fund, 25 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001 or P.O. Box 90500, Washington, DC 20090-0500; (202) 628-3652/Fax: (202) 628- 8333/E-mail: cdfinfo@childrensdefense.org /Web: www.childrensdefense.org/pdf/fs_wellbeing.pdf*

- **Work, welfare, and family well-being,** by Merrile Sing, Heather Hill, and Linda Mendenko. This analysis of a set of Iowa's low-income working families studied the impact of work on family well-being in the strong economy of the late 1990s. Current and former participants in Iowa's version of TANF—the Family Investment Program (FIP)—were surveyed, 16 families in-depth. The majority were female-headed families with 1.9 average children; half resided in rural Iowa; 22 percent had less than a high school education. The findings show that those with jobs appreciated a better lifestyle, but new responsibilities brought with them different problems, such as holding onto a job, lack of health insurance, low parenting self-esteem and skills, and most importantly, inadequate child care and budget issues. Although employment bettered living standards and improved family relationships, still needed from relatives and government programs, including child care subsidies, Medicaid, Food Stamps, and EITC. A significant minority had attention and school attendance problems. The researchers concluded that assistance programs aid survival, but to achieve a feeling of full well-being, workers must earn more than an entry-level salary to support themselves and their families. They suggest policymakers will want to improve access to quality child care; develop supplemental mentoring and supervision programs for school-aged children; look at job retention and employer-based services; improve access to government programs; and help parents with budgeting and financial counseling. (2001, 158 pp.; Document No. PR01-57, $11.00 paper; Web version and Executive Summary free)
*Mathematica Policy Research, P.O. Box 2393, Princeton, NJ 08543-2393; (609) 275-2350/Fax: (609) 799-0005/E-mail: jallen@mathematica-mpr.com/Web: http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/*

**Public Policy Plays Key Role** *(continued from page 9)*

the research clearly shows that the federal Earned Income Tax Credit has spurred an increase in employment among single mothers and lifted millions of children above the poverty line."

But, in some cases, the findings are inconsistent and sometimes controversial. Researchers disagree, for instance, about whether an increase in the minimum wage is likely to lead to a significant increase in unemployment. "There is a lively debate about the impact of minimum wage increases—who benefits, how well they target low-income families, and whether they increase unemployment," says Dr. Cauthen.

Much remains unknown about the impact of government policies on parental employment and family income. "Given the critical importance of understanding these effects," says Dr. Larry Aber, NCCP's director, "the policy briefs will identify key outstanding questions that need to be explored through further research."

The first two briefs of the *Improving Children's Economic Security* series are now available on the NCCP Web site at **www.nccp.org**. The remainder of the series will be released over the coming months. ■

## Publications from NCCP

☐ **FORTHCOMING The Dynamics of Child Care Subsidy Use: A Collaborative Study of Five States.** The Child Care Dynamics Study Team used child care data to study the dynamics of child care subsidy use in Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Texas. Subsequent reports will highlight findings in Illinois, Maryland, and Oregon. The researchers found that the exercise of policy discretion at the state level has produced very different child care subsidy programs in these states that serviced different populations, provided different services, and were characterized by short spells of subsidy receipt and considerable reentry to the subsidy system. The researchers also trace the interaction of other policies on child care subsidy continuity and spell length, and on provider continuity. (July 2002). 60 pp. FREE.

☐ **NEW Promoting the Emotional Well-Being of Children and Families, Policy Paper No. 3: Ready to Enter: What Research Tells Policymakers About Strategies to Promote Social and Emotional School Readiness Among Three- and Four-Year-Old Children.** C. Raver and J. Knitzer. Highlights research findings about the relationship between early academic learning and emotional development; the prevalence of emotional problems in preschoolers and associated risk factors; the role of teachers and child care providers in reducing these problems; and the emerging research on preventive and early intervention strategies, particularly in early care and education settings. (June 2002). 20 pp. $5.00.

☐ **NEW When the Paychecks Stop—Unemployment Insurance Fails to Help Many Former Welfare Recipients Who Lose Their Jobs.** The spring issue of the quarterly newsletter from the NCCP Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism assesses whether the unemployment insurance (UI) program can serve as a safety net for former welfare recipients who lose their jobs and describes research and policy reforms that could help make the UI program more effective in protecting low-income workers and simplifying the complex and variable UI regulations now existing across the states. *the forum*. (May 2002). 6 pp. FREE.

☐ **Improving Children's Economic Security: Research Findings About Increasing Family Income Through Employment Policy Brief No. 1: Policies That Improve Family Income Matter for Children.** N. K. Cauthen. Web series focusing on eight state policy options that have the potential to improve children's economic security by increasing family income. The first installment discusses how income fits into a broader concept of family economic security, addresses the role public policies can play in helping families to achieve economic security, and summarizes current research on the effects of family income on children's development. (April 2002). 8 pp. FREE at www.nccp.org.

☐ **Role of Community Development Corporations in Promoting the Well-Being of Young Children.** J. Knitzer and F. Adely. Describes child development and family support strategies being used by nine community development corporations (CDCs) across the country to promote the healthy development of low-income young children and families. Suggests further roles for CDCS at the community, regional, and national levels to develop and implement child and family policies that benefit low-income families. (January 2002). 24 pp. $5.00.

☐ **Promoting the Emotional Well-Being of Children and Families, Policy Paper No. 2: Improving the Odds for the Healthy Development of Young Children in Foster Care.** S. Dicker, E. Gordon, and J. Knitzer. Focuses on what government agencies, the courts, and other partners can do to improve the physical, developmental, and emotional health of young children in foster care—a particularly vulnerable population of children. (October 2001). 28 pp. $5.00.

☐ **Promoting the Emotional Well-Being of Children and Families, Policy Paper No. 1: Building Services and Systems to Support the Healthy Emotional Development of Young Children—An Action Guide for Policymakers.** J. Knitzer. Describes systemic ways to promote healthy emotional development in young children for policymakers who want to develop new policies and practices. Provides basic information about what kind of help is needed, the systems challenges, and how to develop needed services and infrastructure at the community and state levels. (December 2001). 28 pp. $5.00.

### FROM OTHER PUBLISHERS

☐ **Child Poverty in the U.S.: An Evidence-Based Conceptual Framework for Programs and Policies.** E. T. Gershoff, J. L. Aber, and C. C. Raver. Book chapter from NCCP and University of Chicago staff considers developmental mechanisms through which family economic hardship may translate into negative consequences for children and develops a framework to assess how diverse U.S. family- and child-focused federal programs have attempted to address poverty's effects on children. See *Promoting Positive Child, Adolescent, and Family Development: A Handbook of Program and Policy Innovations*. R. Lerner, F. Jacobs, and D. Wertlieb (Eds.). (Forthcoming spring 2002). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Chapter available at http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/GARchap.html

☐ **Chasing the Red, White, and Blue: A Journey in Tocqueville's Footsteps Through Contemporary America.** D. Cohen. Retraces the route of the French social critic—whose survey of the nation led to his writing of *Democracy in America*, the classic work on the diversity, dreams, and values of American society—to comment on the current conditions and ideals of America and its populous. The British author, who was a Harkness Fellow and hosted by NCCP for three years, sees an America that is divided by prejudices, less compassionate, and increasingly divisive, but also finds a sense of hope alive in the passion for democracy that unites contemporary Americans. Published by Picador USA, November 2001. Distributed by Holtzbrink Publishers, phone: (888) 330-8477. Preview chapters on NCCP's Web site at: www.nccp.org

***Prices include postage and handling. Prepayment or purchase order required. Make checks payable to Columbia University and mail to: NCCP, 154 Haven Avenue, New York, NY 10032-1180, or fax your purchase order to (212) 544-4200 or 544-4201, or e-mail to nccp@columbia.edu.***

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# News & Issues

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Mailman School of Public Health
Columbia University

*Identifying and promoting strategies to reduce child poverty and to improve the life chances of low-income families*

## Children's Readiness for School: Toward a Strategic Policy Framework

by Jane Knitzer

Goal 1 of the 1994 Goals 2000: Educate America Act calls for all children to "start school ready to learn." In the ensuing years, there have been efforts to unpack the definition of school readiness and to develop child, school, community, and state indicators, and identify the evidence base for best practice.

Spurred in part by the states and in part by foundation investments, momentum is growing for universal prekindergarten. The Bush Administration has played a key role in promoting attention to the more cognitive, academic dimensions of school readiness for this age group, particularly early literacy and reading. These efforts, if implemented effectively, will yield important results.

### What Constitutes Being Ready for School?

But research also suggests that aiming primarily at the cognitive and academic development of three- to five-year-olds is too narrow a focus to meet the ambitious goal of the 1994 law. Attention to school readiness starts long before the preschool years and encompasses much more than these dimensions.

What will it take, for example, to ensure that a young child whose family has an income under $9,000 a year and whose mother has less than a high-school education will enter school ready to succeed? What of infants and toddlers with disabilities helped through the Early Intervention program (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act–IDEA), but ineligible for special education services until grade school?

What of children traumatized by early exposure to substance abuse and domestic violence who are unable to concentrate or children who, because of their behaviors, are essentially kicked out of multiple child care settings before they even enter school?

***Integral to ensuring that young children enter school ready to learn are family economic security, nurturing early relationships, child care subsidy policies, early mental health interventions, and meaningful indicators to track commitments to young children.***

### School Readiness is an Opportunity for Policymakers

Drawing on work by NCCP staff and other colleagues, this newsletter issue highlights programmatic and especially policy opportunities to create a strategic school readiness framework to help children. The emphasis is on issues not typically defined as part of a school readiness agenda but integral to ensuring that young children enter school ready to learn—family economic security, nurturing early relationships for infants and toddlers, child care subsidy policies that promote healthy development, early childhood mental health interventions, and meaningful indicators to track state and community commitments to young children. Together, the articles suggest how much more can be done to promote school readiness both by those who care for young children directly and by policymakers who act on their behalf. ■

# School Readiness Starts with Economic Security

Virtually all the proxy indicators for measuring school readiness—especially language development and social emotional skills—paint the same picture. More affluent young children do better.

Findings such as these, says Dr. Jane Knitzer, NCCP's deputy director, have spurred important efforts to improve the quality of early learning, promote universal preschool, and to a lesser extent, build a foundation for infants and toddlers through Early Head Start-type programs. "This is appropriate and important," explains Dr. Knitzer. "But what has been ignored in this agenda is poverty itself."

Richard Rothstein, education columnist for the *New York Times*, argues that the public debate on educational reform in this country is "out of balance." Using both economic and educational data, he contests the prevailing political assumption that poor educational outcomes can be corrected only by educational reform. Instead, he calls for more attention to the role of noneducational influences, such as family income. "The public debate about school readiness," points out Dr. Knitzer, "is also in danger of being 'out of balance' and especially of ignoring the role of family economic security."

### Poverty is Key Factor Limiting School Readiness

From a common sense perspective, there are clear reasons to include policy strategies to promote family economic security and stability as part of a school readiness agenda, says Dr. Knitzer. The children who are most at risk for what developmental psychologist Ross Thompson calls "school unreadiness" are also the approximately 40 percent of young children in the United States who are growing up in families living at or below 200 percent of the poverty level (the poverty guideline for program eligibility for a family of four is set at $18,100 for 2002).

But common sense is not enough, asserts Dr. Knitzer. There is also growing empirical evidence to support greater attention to family economic security through a school readiness lens. Researchers such as Columbia University's Jeanne Brooks-Gunn are finding that poverty in early childhood, particularly persistent or extreme poverty, has more serious consequences for children than child poverty at older ages, especially for cognitive achievement.

Syntheses of experimental studies from welfare experiments by Pamela Morris and her team for the Next Generation Project at MDRC indicate that when family income improves, controlling for other factors, so too does elementary school performance. (The patterns are not the same for adolescents.) In a synthesis of research on how public policies affect family income (see the series *Improving Children's Economic Security: Research Findings About Increasing Family Income Through Employment* at **http://www.nccp.org/improving_security_series.html**), NCCP senior research associate Nancy Cauthen notes that "the stability and predictability of family income, as well as the amount, also matter for child well-being."

***The public debate about school readiness is in danger of being "out of balance" and especially of ignoring the role of family economic security.***

Most relevant for school readiness, analyses of a national longitudinal data set of infants and toddlers by Harvard University's Kathleen McCartney and Eric Dearing and Baylor University's Beck Taylor found that naturally occurring decreases in family income among families in poverty were associated with worse developmental/school readiness outcomes at 36 months, while increases were associated with improved outcomes, sometimes of sufficient magnitude to remove the performance gap between poor and nonpoor children.

### Income Buys Hope, Quality, Services

Exactly what the pathways are by which income improves school readiness is not clear. Perhaps parental messages to children about what is possible change. Perhaps parents use improved income to ensure that their children have better early care and learning experiences.

Over a decade of information from the National Center for Education Statistics providing national (although not state-by-state) data on access to formal learning experiences by income, race, and gender shows a remarkably consistent pattern—income buys access. More affluent children are two to three times more likely to be enrolled in formal settings.

Income also buys quality. Research clearly shows that even when low-income children are in more formal early learning programs, the quality is poorer. Researchers Nicholas Zill at Westat and Jerry West at the National Center for Education Statistics say this disadvantage continues when these children arrive at school—the more risks they have, the more likely the schools they are in lack the resources to help them.

"Income, of course, is not the only noneducational factor relating to access," says Dr. Knitzer, "but clearly it is a critical one." Race, cultural family preferences, and parental expectations also play a role in both access and family choice.

"The message is clear," she concludes. "Deliberate strategies to promote family economic security and reduce child poverty could provide tools of unexpected power to improve educational outcomes for young children." ■

# Infancy Not Too Early to Plan for School Success

A focus on school readiness usually brings to mind the image of a three- to five-year-old preschooler. But in fact, Dr. J. Lee Kreader, associate director for Program and Policy Analysis at NCCP and a former child care administrator in Illinois, says, "getting ready for school begins at or before birth." In the years since 1990, when the National Education Goals Panel set the goal that "all children in America will start school ready to learn," mounting evidence has shown that the roots of school success reach to the very beginnings of children's lives.

***Mounting evidence has shown that the roots of school success reach to the very beginnings of children's lives... For families with low incomes, the potential challenges and needs for supports are much greater.***

## States, Communities Launch Holistic Strategies

Armed with this new knowledge, communities and states across the country have launched innovative initiatives to provide broad supports to families raising babies—and to help them prepare their children for success in school. In 1996, when NCCP first began to track state-level programs for infants and toddlers, only 17 states reported statewide programs. By 2000, 31 states were investing public dollars in programs to promote the well-being of infants and toddlers. Between 1998 and 2000, states doubled the amount of money they spent, although the overall level remains low: $226 million.

Recognizing that the challenge of supporting families with babies and toddlers goes beyond establishing individual programs, NCCP recently profiled 25 community, state, and cross-state initiatives—selected through a national nomination process—that seek to knit together approaches to meet the multiple needs of families during the first three years of their babies lives. The initiatives described in NCCP's new report, *Promoting the Well-being of Infants, Toddlers, and Their Families: Innovative Community and State Strategies*, explains Dr. Karen Mahler, senior research associate at NCCP and one of the authors, "touch the whole range of core concerns affecting young families—economic security, basic supports (including health care, food, and housing), nurturing relationships (within the family and beyond), and supports for more vulnerable families."

**Strategies to Promote Infant and Toddler Well-Being as Part of a Strategic School Readiness Policy Agenda**

- Build community and state infrastructures to promote comprehensive planning, resource sharing, and monitoring.
- Use federal programs such as WIC and Early Head Start as platforms for expanded services.
- Enhance family support services and approaches in settings where young children and families are found (e.g., pediatric offices, child care centers, family resource centers).
- Develop new approaches to training and technical assistance for service providers to reflect emerging best practice.
- Develop targeted strategies to support more families facing special risks, such as providing more intensive, enriched services using Early Head Start and home visiting programs.

The initiatives use five overarching strategies (see box) that maximize the impact of existing resources, especially federal resources, supplemented in some instances by new investments. "Especially in tight budget times, these are lessons for others," says Dr. Kreader.

What was most exciting about looking across the country, Dr. Yvonne Godber, another author of the report says, is that "together, these initiatives provide a menu of concrete approaches that other states and communities can use to help the infants, toddlers, and families in their own communities and states." The five overarching strategies, adds Dr. Jane Knitzer, NCCP's deputy director, "also provide a framework that can help others assess how their own existing resources now targeted to infants, toddlers, and their families might be strengthened and strategically supplemented."

## Initiatives Face Common Challenges, Solutions

The sites had common challenges and often similar innovative solutions. For example, says Dr. Kreader, "to make services more baby and family friendly, many of the initiatives established one-stop shopping and applications at different entry points." They also created unexpected professional partnerships. In one site, legal advocates pair with pediatricians. A number of sites are also developing partnerships with libraries to help parents engage in early literacy activities.

Sites also use technology in truly innovative ways to monitor and evaluate the impact of what they are doing, adds Dr. Kreader. For example, in Alameda County, California, information is used to provide feedback to all the many partners in the county's infrastructure initiative. This serves not only as a record, but as a motivator.

"These initiatives," concludes Dr. Kreader, "help babies and families at a critical, often exciting, and challenging time in their lives. The hope is that, for the longer term, they are also helping to set the stage for the children to enter school ready to learn."

For detailed information on all 25 profiled initiatives and resources to assist other communities and states in developing the comprehensive supports for infants, toddlers, and their families that underpin school readiness, please visit **www.nccp.org**. ■

# Child Care Inadequate for Vulnerable Young Children

Research has helped us understand that many factors influence the core components of school readiness, says Ann Collins, NCCP's director for Program and Policy Analysis. Children's cognitive and social-emotional development, their physical health, and their eagerness to learn are built on a foundation of good parenting, economically secure families, and early childhood settings that promote children's learning.

And, she emphasizes , child care subsidies—which help make child care affordable for low-income families—hold the potential to support several of these foundational pillars. Subsidies give families more purchasing power for child care, increasing the likelihood that they can pay for higher quality early childhood settings. They also can support parents' employment or their education and training, leading to more economically secure families.

***The subsidy system as it is today can enhance children's school readiness only at the margins, but it holds the potential to support several foundational pillars [that lead to success in school].***

## Child Care Subsidies Short

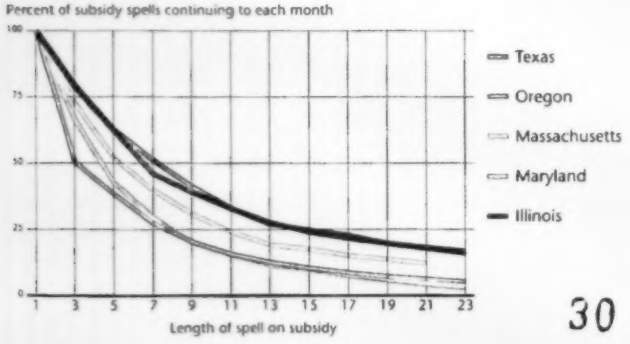
In 1996, as part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, Congress created the Child Care and Development Fund. As a result, public child care spending doubled by 2000. Although many families still wait for child care subsidies in many states, many more families receive them than before.

What do we know about how these child care subsidies have actually influenced school readiness for those families fortunate enough to receive them? According to Ms. Collins, no studies have asked and answered this question in a definitive way. But recent research gives us reason for concern.

One study indicates that families do not have subsidies for long periods of time. In *The Dynamics of Child Care Subsidy Use: A Collaborative Study of Five States*, a multi-state team of researchers that included NCCP suggests that the assistance families receive is not continuous, does not last for a very long period of time, and may be associated with substantial turnover in their children's child care arrangements. The study team found that the average length of subsidy receipt ranged from a low of three months in Oregon to a high of seven months in Texas. There was also considerable reentry; at least one-third of the children were back in the subsidy system within 12 months of leaving it. "These findings do not bode well either for families' economic security or for children's social-emotional development," points out Ms. Collins.

"The study did not identify the reasons for these short periods of subsidies, but it is likely the causes are numerous," she says. Some may relate to administrative difficulties of the subsidy system and others to the lack of work stability in these low-income families' lives. In support of the latter point, at a recent conference, Abt Associates Inc., reporting on a survey of parents completed for the National Study of Child Care for Low-Income Families, said that nearly three-quarters of low-income parents worked nontraditional hours: evenings, nights, weekends, and different hours from week to week. Further, a qualitative study of low-income families leaving welfare for work, conducted by NCCP post-doctoral fellow Ajay Chaudry, documents dramatic work and child care instability in great detail.

**Survival Rate—First Observed Spell Starting During Observation Period**




## Unstable Work Makes Unstable Child Care

The rules governing child care subsidies tie them directly to the hours that families work. If parents' work hours change, in most states the subsidies will adjust to match. If parents go more than 30 days between jobs, most states end their subsidies. "How can a child care setting support children's school readiness if a caregiver sees a child for three days one week, four evenings the next week, and then the child leaves in six months?" asks Ms. Collins. "How can subsidies help parents to be employed if they must constantly negotiate with the subsidy system as their work arrangements change?"

The answers to these questions, she says, lead to the conclusion that, "at best, the subsidy system as it is today can enhance many children's school readiness only at the margins." For many low-income families that desire to have their preschoolers in an early childhood setting on a regular and continuous basis regardless of work hours or jobs—subsidies may not help them get there. "New, creative thinking is needed to make our early childhood systems reflect the realities of low-income families working lives and their desires for their children," she concludes. ■

# Parents Hold Keys to Promoting School Readiness

More clearly than ever, research points to the importance of the family in shaping young children's social and emotional well-being and readiness for school. And the family is the primary influence on child development in the years before kindergarten.

"What is experienced within the family is transferred to social relationships beyond the family: the home environment and events that occur within the context of parent-child interactions affect children's behavior in other settings such as child care and school," explains Dr. Kathryn Taaffe McLearn, a senior fellow at NCCP and co-editor of the recently published book *Child Rearing in America: The Challenges Facing Parents with Young Children.* "This volume chronicles the lives of families with young children," says Dr. McLearn. The authors used the Commonwealth Survey of Parents with Young Children—a nationally representative data set of more than 2,000 mothers and fathers with children ages birth to three—to explore the economic and social challenges that parents face, examine basic child rearing behaviors associated with school readiness, and identify factors that can lessen parents' engagement in activities that promote school readiness.

***The family is the primary source of inputs into child development in the years before kindergarten... but high rates of parental depression put low-income young children in double jeopardy [for lack of school readiness].***

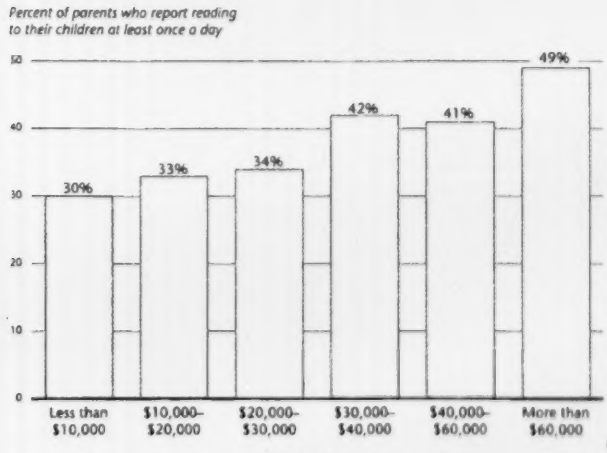
## Reading, Rhymes, Routines: Three Rs for Parents

"We found that parents understand that learning starts in infancy, and they are eager for information on encouraging their young child to learn," says Dr. McLearn. Parental activities such as reading or book sharing, rhymes (a shorthand for playing, hugging, and cuddling), and routines are the three Rs of early education and are fundamental to early childhood development, she adds. These parental behaviors and activities stimulate cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development in children before formal schooling begins.

Yet a significant number of mothers and fathers are missing opportunities to read, nurture, play, and establish routines with their children. The study reveals only two out of 10 parents report reading to their babies daily. Only 45 percent of parents of toddlers over age 24 months are likely to read with their children daily. Parents of toddlers over 24 months are also less likely to engage in playful activities than parents of toddlers under age two (78 percent as compared to 85 percent). Only slightly more than half the parents of one- and two-year-olds report having daily routines for meals, naps, and bedtimes.

In addition, parents who engage in book sharing activities are also the same parents who play and cuddle their children and establish daily routines, points out Dr. McLearn. "These parents are offering their children activities that encourage broad cognitive, linguistic, and affective developmental experiences."

**Low Income Adversely Affects Parents Reading to Their Young Children**




## Income, Education, Depression Potent Factors

The study indicates that mothers and fathers who have not completed high school report being less likely than parents with higher education and income levels to engage in daily shared reading, playing, and hugging. Parents who have not completed high school and single parents are also less likely to maintain daily routines for their young children than both two-parent families and those parents with more than a high school education.

The survey also confirms that depressive symptoms affect parenting ability. Mothers and fathers reporting more depressive symptoms are sad, withdrawn, and less likely to engage in positive child rearing behaviors; at the same time, these parents tend to be irritable and critical with their children and to use coercive or intrusive methods of discipline. They get more aggravated and frustrated with their young children's behaviors and are more likely to yell, spank, and hit than nondepressed parents.

Unfortunately, notes Dr. McLearn, parental rates of depressive symptoms increase dramatically as access to financial and personal resources decline—nearly a third of the low-income single mothers with infants and young children in the study reported being depressed. "These high rates of parental depression put low-income young

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# Center News Briefs

- The fourth title in NCCP's policy series: Promoting the Emotional Well-Being of Children and Families, released in July, is: *Making Dollars Follow Sense: Financing Early Childhood Mental Health Services to Promote Healthy Social and Emotional Development in Young Children*. Based on five case studies, it describes innovative approaches states and communities are using to finance preventive and early intervention services as well as more traditional treatment for young children's mental health.
- NCCP and other organizations looking at the dynamics of child care subsidy use in Oregon released a report in July—*Continuity and Stability: Dynamics of Child Care Subsidy Use in Oregon*—that provides a detailed look at Oregon families receiving child care subsidies and the factors associated with their short length of subsidy receipt and low-provider stability and compares these findings with those of four other states.
- The first in a series of State Child Poverty Updates released in August reveals that a growing majority of California's poor children live in working families. *The Changing Face of Child Poverty in California* shows that the rate and number of low-income children in California has risen significantly—one in six poor U.S. children lives in California, and almost 60 percent of California's poor children have immigrant parents.
- The second policy paper in a Web-based series, *Improving Family Economic Security*, posted to **www.nccp.org** in July, focuses on the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, the nation's largest cash program directed at low-income families and also its most effective one for lifting children out of poverty. The paper synthesizes research on this tax credit that encourages and rewards employment and discusses questions researchers should study.
- The fourth annual edition of *Welfare Research Perspectives: Past, Present, and Future*, published in August by NCCP's Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism, updates what has been learned since 1996 about the impact of changing welfare policies and what research activities and findings can be used to inform the debate over TANF reauthorization. Despite major declines in welfare cases since 1996, there is still much to learn about the needs of low-income workers and the barriers faced by more vulnerable individuals. See: **www.researchforum.org**.
- Children of immigrants are more likely to be poor, although many of them live in two-parent families and have at least one parent who is employed full-time, some with more than a high school education. These are among the findings in: *Children of Immigrants: A Statistical Profile*, published in September. What accounts for these findings, and the distinct experiences of different racial/ethnic groups, should be part of the ongoing debate over TANF reauthorization.
- The September 2002 issue of ***the forum*** describes the growing national TANF child-only caseload (welfare cases in which a child is living with neither parent), focusing on the situation in one state, South Carolina. It reveals an urgent need for increased financial and emotional support to the caretakers—mainly grandparents —and new programs to fill these needs.

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**Parents Hold Keys to Promoting School Readiness** *(continued from page 5)*

children in double jeopardy."

These findings suggest the need for concerted and focused efforts to increase parents' awareness of the relationship between early home experiences and later school readiness and success. But other important figures in the lives of young children can also play a role in improving children's early experiences, says Dr. McLearn.

## Many Professionals Can Play Role

Child care providers are in a central position to promote school readiness competencies by engaging in the three R's for their very young charges. Along with other professionals, they can provide information and support about parents' roles in facilitating early child development. Pediatric offices are a natural point for increased delivery of services and information to parents about early childhood, and they can give referrals to other community-based health services or parenting supports.

"These analyses provide a window into the challenges parents face in rearing their young children," says Dr. Larry Aber, NCCP's director. "It is increasingly clear that mothers and fathers want and need more support and information in the early years of their children's lives, so that children are socially and emotionally competent, ready to learn, and succeed in school." He urges policymakers to invest in social policies and targeted interventions that provide family development support for all young children, but especially for those in low-income families. "These investments are crucial for children to succeed in school."

For more information about *Child Rearing in America* and to view NCCP's work on vulnerable families, please visit NCCP on the Web at **www.nccp.org**. ■

VIEW FROM THE FIELD—THE EWING MARION KAUFFMAN FOUNDATION

# Positive Social-Emotional Development Creates Strong Foundation for School Achievement

*by Lisa G. Klein*

*Lisa G. Klein, Ph.D. is vice president of early education at the Kauffman Foundation and served 10 years as its manager of research and evaluation. Previously, she spent a decade in the nonprofit community, working on comprehensive child development and mental health issues.*

Anyone reading the paper or watching the news over the past several months has been exposed to stories about the importance of school success. Unfortunately, state reports of the percentage of children not ready to succeed range from 20 percent to a staggering 49 percent. As a result, multiple federal, state, and local initiatives are striving to promote school readiness and later academic success. In 1994, Congress enacted the Goals 2000: Educate America Act; its first goal is: "All children will start school ready to learn." The 107th Congress introduced the Foundations for Learning Act, aimed at reducing the risk of early school failure. In April 2002, President Bush announced a new initiative called: Good Start, Grow Smart, a plan to strengthen early learning in young children.

This initiative is shared by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and grew out of the concern that children are not reading on grade level by the end of third grade. Research has shown strong correlations between low literacy at this time and later academic failure. The Bush administration designed Good Start, Grow Smart to be consistent with scientific evidence showing that intervention in early childhood has the greatest impact on later growth and development.

## Link Social-Emotional and Cognitive Development

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation is committed to the goal that all children enter school prepared to succeed and be successful in school and in life. The question being raised here and by early childhood experts, child advocates, and education professionals is: What is necessary to insure that all children succeed in school?

Over 40 years of research has identified criteria that increase the probability that children grow and develop to their full potential. Recently, the National Academy of Sciences report, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: the Science of Early Childhood Development*, identified three qualities that children need to be ready for school: intellectual skills, motivation to learn, and strong socio-emotional capacity. Strong social-emotional development underlies all later social, emotional, and academic success. Young children who develop strong early relationships with parents, family, caregivers, and teachers learn how to pay attention, cooperate, and get along with others; they are confident in their ability to explore and learn from the world around them.

Longitudinal research on the Abecedarian Project and the Chicago Parent-Child Program have shown that children entering school with well-developed cognitive and social skills are most likely to succeed and least likely to need costly intervention services later, such as special education or juvenile justice. Other research shows that the stressors facing many children, particularly those who are poor and of color, limit their ability to successfully cope effectively. Children dealing with early deprivation or trauma, family instability or conflict, involvement in the child welfare system, and neighborhood danger, and limited resources often experience problems in social-emotional functioning and delay in the acquisition of initial academic skills. Early identification of mental health problems in ethnic minority and low-income children coupled with effective referral and service delivery has long-term implications for preventing academic failure.

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**About the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation**

*The Kauffman Foundation and its partners look beyond need to identify and pursue pivotal opportunities to improve the education of children and the creation of successful businesses in Kansas City and nationwide. The Kauffman Foundation has an asset base of approximately $1.7 billion and invests more than $100 million each year in grants and programs focused on education and entrepreneurship. For more information about the foundation, visit its Web site at www.emkf.org.*

**EMKF Contributions to Understanding and Promoting School Readiness**

- Funded a five-year demonstration in early education that integrates key components of successful early education programs: quality settings, professional work force development, and compensation commensurate with level of teacher education.
- Jointly funded (with Packard and Ford Foundations) the School Readiness Indicators and Policy Assistance Initiative, a 16-state collaboration to: (1) identify state indicators of school readiness, and (2) establish an early childhood policy network (see http://gettingready.org/) to help states use the indicator data and trends to inform policy decisions and budgets.
- Established The Kauffman Early Education Exchange to explore school readiness activities, practice, and policy.
- Original member of FAN—the Child Mental Health Foundation and Agencies Network—a group of public and private agencies and foundations interested in improving the link between programs and policies that affect young children.

**Positive Social-Emotional Development** *(continued from page 7)*

## Create Multiple Focus, Programs, Policies

To insure children's success in school, we must go beyond a single focus and target programs and policies that connect strong cognitive and literacy development with positive social and emotional development. Today over 60 percent of children under age six are in some form of child care or early childhood program. These programs have become logical places to establish partnerships between mental health professionals, teachers, families, and children. Mental health services offered to children and families in familiar, trusted, nonthreatening community-based settings are a prevention opportunity to promote strong social-emotional and cognitive development as well as an intervention service to those children and families at risk for developing delays or serious problems that will deter later success.

For example, the national Head Start and Early Head Start programs include prevention strategies for building strong social-emotional development in young children and help families cope with increasing stress along with an increasing focus on reading and literacy. Starting Early Starting Smart, an initiative between the Marguerite Casey Foundation and the DHHS's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in nine states, integrates behavioral health services into accessible, nonthreatening settings where families usually take their children, such as early education settings and pediatric health care facilities. Vermont, the only state to build a statewide system of mental health services and supports, has integrated these services into the early child-serving system. The city of San Francisco has pooled over $2 million to provide mental health consultation services to more than 50 child care centers and 100 family day care homes.

**The Kauffman Early Education Exchange**

Joan Lombardi facilitates The Kauffman Early Education Exchange. The Exchange began with a series of papers that present the latest scientific research and compelling evidence about the role of social and emotional factors in preparing young children for school success. Other papers cover implications for practice and policy.

**The Research Base**

- *The Roots of Social-Emotional Development*, by Ross Thompson, Ph.D.
- *The Connections between Social-Emotional Development and Early Literacy*, by Linda Espinosa, Ph.D. and Rebecca McCathren, Ph.D
- *Culture and Ethnicity in Social, Emotional, and Academic Development*, by Oscar Barbarin, Ph.D. with Marilou Hyson, Discussant

**Implications for Practice**

- *Promising Social-Emotional Development in Young Children: The Role of Mental Health Consultants in Early Childhood Settings*, by Paul Donahue, Ph.D.
- *Promoting Social-Emotional Development in Young Children: Promising Approaches at the National, State, and Community Levels*, by Roxane Kaufmann, Ph.D. and Deborah Perry, Ph.D., with Dwayne Crompton, Panel Discussant and Tammy Mann, Discussant

**Implications for Policy**

- *Promoting Social-Emotional Readiness for School: Toward a Policy Agenda*, by Jane Knitzer, Ph.D. with Sandra Adams, Discussant and Jack Shonkoff, Ph.D., Discussant

For copies of the full papers see the Foundation's Web site at: **http://www.emkf.org/**

## Timing is Right for Change

The time is right to build on the knowledge base and current enthusiasm for promoting school success. There are, however, several challenges to putting this idea into practice and policy—the current emphasis on literacy alone, societal beliefs about child rearing as solely a family responsibility, economic deficits in the states, and the tragic events of September 11. The following recommendations will enable us to start:

- *Create a common understanding of what good social-emotional development is and how it underlies later academic success.* Social-emotional development and academic achievement are not separate goals but represent the continuum of development that is needed for children to grow up healthy and succeed in school.
- *Build broad-based public and political will to make the healthy growth and comprehensive development of young children a priority.* The knowledge-base linking social, emotional, and cognitive development exists but needs to be disseminated more widely to parents, teachers, caregivers, and policymakers.
- *Commit public and private investment in the types of programs and policies that are proven to result in greater success for young children and families.* Policies that enhance the social, emotional, and cognitive well-being of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and their families must be a priority and receive appropriate public investment in order to achieve the goal of children entering school ready to learn and succeed.
- *Build expertise for parents, families, providers, and teachers in order to promote strong social-emotional development in all young children, particularly those at-risk for serious problems and delays.* Programs need to provide training and education to promote social-emotional development and strong relationships between young children and their families, their teachers, and their caregivers if children are to succeed without costly interventions in special education or juvenile justice.
- *Assure good outcomes by assessing progress and tracking indicators of social-emotional development and its relation to later school readiness and academic success.* The 16-state collaborative school readiness indicators and policy initiative described on the Getting Ready Web site (**gettingready.org/**) is a good start.

Promoting policies that enhance the social, emotional, and cognitive well-being of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and their families must be a priority and receive appropriate public investment. By these means, we can achieve the goal of children entering school ready to learn and succeed. ■

POLICY POINT OF VIEW

# States Use Indicators of School Readiness to Improve Public Policies for Young Children

*by Elizabeth Burke Bryant and Catherine B. Walsh*

*Elizabeth Burke Bryant, J.D., is executive director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, the children's policy organization based in Providence, Rhode Island, that is managing the national school readiness indicators initiative. She has served as director of policy for the city of Providence, a prosecutor in the Providence Housing Court, and a staff member of the Democratic National Committee.*

*Catherine B. Walsh, M.P.H., is deputy director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. Previously, she was program officer at the Rhode Island Foundation and regional manager for maternal child health programs at the Massachusetts Department of Health.*

***There is a critical need for state government ownership and accountability for the trends evident when indicators are tracked over time.***

Too many children enter kindergarten with physical, social, emotional, and cognitive limitations that could have been minimized or eliminated through early attention to child and family needs. Ongoing research confirms that children's readiness for school is multi-faceted, encompassing the whole range of skills that children need to thrive. A growing consensus on the characteristics of the school-ready child suggests that supports are most critical for children who are at high developmental risk due to their own or their parents' physical or mental health issues, poverty, or other risk factors.

Thanks to the combined efforts of child advocates, pioneering elected officials, early childhood experts, foundations, the media, and parents, the issue of school readiness is in the forefront of public discourse. Many top policymakers, including the nation's governors, are increasingly committed to doing what it takes to help children arrive at school ready to learn. They know that their ambitious goals for children's educational achievement in the K–12 education system depend on maximizing learning and healthy development in the early years.

As governors and state legislatures adopt early childhood policies and make investments in programs for young children, how will they know which investments are most needed? How will they know if their efforts are indeed increasing the odds that young children will enter elementary school with what they need to succeed?

## Indicators Important Tool for Changing Policy

Experience in states and communities across the nation has proven that indicators of child well-being can be an important tool for bringing government and community leaders together to make strategic investments in children and families. Through the Annie E. Casey Foundation's national KIDS COUNT initiative, child indicators have been reported routinely by KIDS COUNT projects in all 50 states. Child Trends, a Washington, D.C.-based research organization, has been an excellent technical assistance resource for states and communities that are developing child indicators. Increasingly, indicators are being used at the community level to promote a change agenda aimed at improving the quality of life for children and families.

The most powerful sets of indicators combine information on child outcomes with systems indicators that monitor the capacity of child and family programs to meet the variable needs that exist across communities. The regular reporting of indicators that describe the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive well-being of children enables state policymakers and opinion leaders to identify areas most in need of intervention, track the results of their investments, and watch trends over time.

Recent examples from Rhode Island show how the tracking of child indicators can be a potent tool to bring about beneficial public policies. Five years ago, new indicators were developed that revealed the alarmingly high percentage of children entering kindergarten with elevated levels of lead in their bloodstreams. As a result, a comprehensive communitywide effort was launched to enhance lead poisoning prevention, screening, and treatment efforts, and childhood lead poisoning has been dramatically reduced.

In another public policy area, newly developed early education indicators, unveiled in 1996, showed that the number of licensed child care slots in the state of Rhode Island would be insufficient to accommodate even a fraction of the young children of parents making the transition from welfare to work. This important indicator, tracked every year both statewide and for every city and town, was the impetus for a major increase in state funding for child care.

## National Initiative Addresses Gaps

While a strong foundation for child indicator work has been laid during the past decade, there is a clear gap in

(continued on page 10)

**States Use Indicators of School Readiness** *(continued from page 9)*

indicators available to measure child well-being between birth and school entry. Even the most comprehensive lists of childhood indicators have a gaping hole between infant indicators (such as the infant mortality rate and the percentage of babies born at low birthweight) and fourth grade reading scores.

Additional indicators are needed that reflect family and community assets and the capacity of the service system to provide support to young children and their families. With a powerful set of school readiness indicators that tell us how children are faring between birth and age 8, we will be better able to assess the impact of current investments and respond when we need increased investments in order to "turn the curve" on trend lines that are going in the wrong direction for young children and families.

In October 2001, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation formed a funding partnership to launch a national school readiness indicators initiative—School Readiness Indicators: Making Progress for Young Children—with 16 participating states (California, Colorado, Arizona, Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Kansas, Wisconsin, Virginia, New Jersey, and the six New England states). The initiative has three goals: (1) to create a set of measurable indicators related to and defining school readiness that can be tracked regularly over time at the state and local levels; (2) to have states adopt this indicators-based definition of school readiness, fill in the gaps in data availability, track data over time, and report findings to their citizens; and (3) to stimulate policy, program, and other actions to improve the ability of all children to read at grade level by the end of third grade.

Each state is selecting a set of early childhood indicators that supports a policy agenda designed to improve school readiness and outcomes for children from birth through the beginning of fourth grade. The school readiness indicators will be both comprehensive and practical and able to monitor the capacity of child and family programs to meet the variable needs that exist across communities. They will reflect state investments in programs and policies for young children and families as well as child outcomes, yet broad enough to present a picture of the whole child, including children's health status, what children know and can do, children's mental and emotional health, and children's economic well-being.

## State Governments Must Play Bigger Role

The School Readiness Indicators initiative recognizes that there is a critical need for state government ownership and accountability for the trends evident when indicators are tracked over time. State and local governments have more control over resources for young children and their families than any other group. State government partners need to invest in indicator systems, work to improve data and accountability systems, and use the results to inform policy and budget decisions. For this reason, the 16 state teams are made up of officials from the highest levels of state government, including a lead state agency designated by the governor, top policy and data staff from other key state agencies, leaders from nonprofit child policy organizations, and legislators or other community leaders who have taken leadership on early childhood issues.

Over the course of the initiative, the 16 states will work as a group to develop a full set of measures to monitor school readiness outcomes, envisioned as a "menu" of indicators that reflect the full range of child outcomes and systems outcomes that are critical to the well-being of young children and families across the nation. While not every state will agree to use all of the indicators, it is expected that each state will develop and strategically use selected indicators to monitor its own progress. We believe that the collective work of this initiative will play an important role in shaping the agenda for young children and families across the country.

For further information on the National School Readiness Indicators initiative, visit its Web site at **www.gettingready.org**. ■

**School Readiness Indicators: Making Progress for Young Children**

The following examples of school readiness indicators address components of the system of services available for young children and families.

**Systems Indicators**

- Percent of 3- and 4-year-old children enrolled in a high quality early care and education program
- Percent of children with health insurance coverage
- Percent of families spending more than 30 percent of their income for housing
- Percent of schools offering universal access to full-day kindergarten
- Number of children excluded from child care due to behavioral problems per 100 children enrolled
- Percent of children with undetected hearing, vision, or dental problems at school entry
- Number of adults enrolled in adult education or English as a Second Language programs per 100 adults seeking these services

NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY
Mailman School of Public Health
Columbia University

J. Lawrence Aber *Director*
Jane Knitzer *Deputy Director*

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# Publications of Note

*This column highlights recent publications related to school readiness recommended for program administrators and policymakers by the Center's staff.* ***Documents should be ordered directly from the publishers listed.***

- **A school of our own: Parents, power, and community at the East Harlem Block Schools,** by Tom Roderick. Chronicling the first 15 years of the East Harlem Block Schools, this book describes the efforts of a community to improve the education of its children, strengthen families, involve residents in public life, provide living-wage jobs for parents, and develop neighborhood institutions. Started by a small group of mothers, the schools incorporated a parent-controlled board and employment of low-income parents as assistant teachers with professional educators who were dedicated to a child-centered, experiential learning environment. The Block Schools overcame barriers by concentrating advocacy efforts on local legislators, collaborating with citywide advocacy groups, engaging the community in fundraising events, and working with private foundations to develop financial strategies that bridged the gaps between private and public funding. Elements unique to the organization that led to its success were: (1) strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect among parents, professional educators, and children; (2) parental control of school administration; (3) community participation; and (4) the sense of purpose and control over their lives that families experienced by being involved with the schools and the organization. (2001; 192 pp., Teaching for Social Justice Series; $48 cloth, $21.95 paperback)
*Teachers College Press, P.O. Box 20, Williston, VT 05495-0020; (800)575-6566/Fax: (802) 864-7626/E-mail: tcpress@tc.columbia.edu/ Web: http://store.tcpress.com/0807741566.shtml#677*

- **An uneven start: Indicators of inequality in school readiness,** by Richard J. Coley. Analyzing cross-sectional data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS), Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999, this report examines the inequities among children that are apparent upon school entry. It documents indicators of the types of children who may be educationally at-risk when they begin school by measuring numerous aspects of reading and mathematics proficiency and home reading experiences evaluated according to demographic characteristics. It highlights the especially substantial differences found among groupings of children by socioeconomic status (SES). The findings point to the need to address differences in children's literacy development and learning readiness before they enter school and to provide effective preschool experiences for children at risk. (2002, 75 pp.; free)
*Educational Testing Service, Policy Information Center, Mail Stop 04-R, Rosedale Road, Princeton, NJ 08541-0001. (609) 734-5694/Email: pic@ets.org/Web: http://www.ets.org/research/pic*

- **Out of balance: Our understanding of how schools affect society and how society affects schools,** by Richard Rothstein. This essay, presented at the Spencer Foundation 30th Anniversary Conference: Traditions of Scholarship in Education, January 2002, contends that the discourse on academic achievement and educational standards has been based on two faulty assumptions: (1) school reform can solve the economic problems of competitiveness and inequality; and (2) schools are the sole institution responsible for educating Americans. He asserts that the nation's economic health is not primarily a function of educational success; in fact, in the next decade, most workers will be overeducated for their tasks. He outlines the ways that societal forces and institutions other than schools affect academic achievement: family income, housing, nutrition, prenatal care, maternal smoking, access to health and dental care, lead exposure, and community resources. He questions the funneling of resources into smaller classes and better educated teachers and argues for broader efforts to strengthen families through a variety of social, economic, and educational interventions that address and ameliorate underlying inequalities in American society. (2002, 28 pp.; free)
*The Spencer Foundation, 875 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 3930, Chicago, IL 60611-1803. (312) 337-7000/Fax: (312) 337-0282/Email: information@spencer.org/Web: http://www.spencer.org*

- **Preschool for all: Investing in a productive and just society,** by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development. This "call to action" urges state and federal policymakers to make the educational needs of children aged three and up a national priority by creating a system of universal, publicly funded preschool. The committee makes a case for a systematic approach to ensuring that publicly funded pre-k is made available to all preschool children whose parents want them to enroll. Yet existing efforts in states and localities are inadequate to make universal early education a reality. It offers five principles to guide the development of a universal preschool system: access; delivery; financing; infrastructure, quality improvement and oversight; and data and research. Sections examine shortcomings in the U.S. approach to early learning, outline an approach to providing preschool for all children, estimate the costs of a universal pre-k system, describe the demographics of children in early education programs, examine school readiness indicators, highlight selected state early education efforts, and summarize universal preschool policies in other countries. (2002, 43 pp.; $15 paperback, free online)
*Committee for Economic Development, Book Division, 261 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10022. (212) 688-2063 ext. 229/Fax: (212) 758-9068/Email: info@ced.org/Web: www.ced.org/docs/report/ report_preschool.pdf*

- **Investing in better care for infants and toddlers: The next frontier for school readiness,** by Joan Lombardi and Julie Poppe. This edition of the National Conference of State Legislatures' *State Legislative Report* describes recent trends in state spending on infant and toddler care. Using money from the Child Care and Development Fund, expansion of Head Start and Early Head Start, and the Early Childhood Opportunities Act, state spending for child development and family support programs designed for infants and toddlers more than doubled between 1998 and mid-2001. States have acted in three critical areas: ensuring safe and healthy child care, improving the supply of quality infant and toddler care, and supporting families with children from birth to age three. They are strengthening regulations in child care centers and requiring lower child-to-staff ratios; legislating for the inclusion of children with special needs; creating health hotlines for parents and providers; putting health consultants in child care centers; implementing Early Head Start programs; and expanding training and support. States have also raised reimbursement rates to expand the supply of quality care and grant parents more child care choices. In addition, many have initiated home visiting and public awareness programs to educate parents and parents-to-be about early development, and some have created family leave policies. (October 2001, 15 pp.; $7, free online)
*National Conference of State Legislatures, Book Order Department, 1560 Broadway, Suite 700, Denver, CO 80202. (303) 830-2054/Fax: (303) 863-8003/Email: books@ncsl.org/Web: http://www.ncsl.org/programs/ cyf/juliepSLR.PDF*

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## Internet Resources on School Readiness

**Board on Children, Youth, and Families**
National nonpartisan organization established by the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine to provide analysis about the behavioral, social, and health implications of policies and programs for children, youth, and families. Committees of the board conduct and synthesize research and release publications about these issues.
<http://www7.nationalacademies.org/bocyf/>

**Child Trends**
Conducts research and provides data on children's health and well-being. Examines the effects of welfare and poverty on children and studies issues relating to family structure and parenting. Manages the Child Trends Database, an online collection of information on indicators of child and family well-being that includes an early development section containing information on school readiness, child care, and enrollment in preschool programs.
http://www.childtrends.org

**Early Head Start National Resource Center**
Operated by Zero to Three and WestEd, the resource center collaborates with the Infant/Toddler Specialists at Early Head Start Quality Improvement Centers to ensure that programs in all regions have information and training on "best practices" for young children. The resource center also works on capacity building at the federal level.
<http://www.ehsnrc.org>

**ERIC Elementary and Early Childhood Education Clearinghouse**
Provides information on the development, education, and care of children from birth through early adolescence for educators, advocates, parents, and families. Includes digests of research and information as well as access to several listservs on early childhood development and education issues.
<http://ericeece.org/>

**Even Start Program**
Run through the U.S. Department of Education, this program combines adult literacy, parenting education, early childhood education, and interactive parent and child literacy activities. It is designed to help parents improve their literacy and basic educational skills, help parents become full partners in educating their children, and assist children in reaching their full learning potentials.
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/CEP/evenstprogresp.html>

**Facts in Action: Early Education Clearinghouse**
Summaries of recent research, important facts and statistics, reports on tools that are useful to measure outcomes, and legislative and administrative policy updates provided for advocates and practitioners in the early childhood field.
<http://www.factsinaction.org/>

**Getting Ready**
Web site of the School Readiness Indicators and Policy Assistance Initiative, a 16-state initiative to develop and track child well-being indicators from birth to fourth grade to build a change agenda in states and local communities to improve school readiness and ensure early school success. Provides information on developing school readiness indicators, policies, and communications, participating state activities, key publications and Web sites, and relevant meetings.
<http://gettingready.org/>

**Good Start, Grow Smart**
The Bush Administration's early childhood education initiative. The policy framework includes strengthening Head Start, partnering with states to improve early childhood education, and providing information about child development to teachers, caregivers, and parents.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/earlychildhood/toc.html>

**National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**
A coalition of early childhood educators and advocates that works to improve professional practice and employment conditions and build public support for high quality early childhood programs.
<http://www.naeyc.org>

**National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)**
*Promoting the Emotional Well-Being of Children and Families*
A new policy publication series that builds on NCCP's earlier work to document effective strategies and highlight policy opportunities and challenges to promote the emotional health of young children and families as a component of school readiness. Will help policymakers, community leaders, and advocates take action to ensure the healthy development of children and their families.
<http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/promoting_emotional_series.html>

**National Governors' Association**
*First Three Years: Governor's Guide to Early Childhood*
Resources and information on early childhood research, initiatives, and policy. Web site contains guides on accountability systems, early care and education, finance strategies, health, public engagement, research, state initiatives, and facts and figures about early childhood. Includes links to state early childhood Web sites, other child care, education, and child advocacy organizations, community-based and foundation initiatives, and research, data, and program evaluation Web sites.
<http://www.nga.org/center/divisions/1,1188,C_ISSUE_BRIEF^D_1634,00.html>

**Rhode Island Kid's Count**
Collects comprehensive information on indicators of child well-being in order to improve the health, safety, education, economic security, and development of Rhode Island's children. Web site contains data and publications, including fact books, census briefs, and city and town fact sheets that provide information on children in Rhode Island.
http://www.rikidscount.org/rikc/

**Zero to Three**
Resources for parents and professionals on the first three years of children's lives. Disseminates key developmental information, trains providers, promotes model approaches and standards of practice, and works to increase public awareness about the significance of a child's first three years of life.
<http://www.zerotothree.org/>

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